

Epping Forest Countrycare

24th Annual Report

2009 – 2010



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Who we are: Epping Forest Countrycare is Epping Forest District Council's Countryside Management Service. Based within the Policy and Environment section of the Directorate of Planning and Economic Development, 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. Countrycare has just entered its 25th year and since its establishment in 1986, it has developed a credible and proven track record for delivering quality projects and attracting external grant funding. This in turn has developed strong community support and trust, which staff have been able to harness to good effect. 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 and gain public support for community based project works.

What we do: Operating across the entire 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.

Countrycare is also the Council's key resource for advice on biodiversity, nature conservation law and protected species, green infrastructure and legislation such as the Hedgerow Regulations. Countrycare undertakes a key role within the Planning process by giving advice to Development Control Officers on biodiversity implications within planning applications.

Our key objectives;

- To conserve and promote the biodiversity of the district and implement the goals of the Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan.
- To promote 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.

Countrycare's core activities last year included;

- **Community Involvement** – coordination of the Countrycare Volunteer Group and the Epping Forest Tree Warden Scheme.
- **Biodiversity, habitat management and creation** – managing 40 sites across the District including Local Wildlife Sites and Local Nature Reserves. Coordinating the Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan.
- **Ecological advice on habitat management and protected species** – giving advice to landowners (Local Wildlife Sites) , parish councils and Development Control Officers.
- **Educational activities** – work with schools, organising guided walks and events.
- **Green infrastructure and access improvements** – planting over 3,000 trees and improving access to public green space such as Chigwell Row Wood LNR
- **Securing External Funding** – 11 grant applications securing over £39,000 for biodiversity projects across the District.

The Countrycare Team: From 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010, Countrycare had four permanent members of staff complemented by a number of temporary staff, volunteers and student work placements.

Personnel	Role	Dates
Paul Hewitt	Countryside Manager	
Andrew Vaughan	Assistant Countryside Manager	
Jordan Thomas	Assistant Countryside Manager	
David Roddick	Countryside Assistant	Left 24/07/09
Nick Wells	Countryside Assistant (Temporary)	10/08/09 to 02/10/09
Abigail Oldham	Assistant Countryside Manager (Trainee)	Started 23/11/09
Abigail Oldham	Local Wildlife Sites Surveyor	07/01/2009 to 22/11/09
Kevin Mason	Work Placement Student: Assistant Local Wildlife Sites Surveyor	14/04/09 to 26/06/09
Nick Wells	Work Placement Student: Trainee Countryside Assistant	20/04/09 to 29/05/09
Nicola Rogers	Countryside Assistant	Started 18/01/10

Our Achievements for 2009/10

The Service's principal achievements of 2009/10 can be summarised as follows:

Community Involvement

- Organised 99 practical project days involving 1,044 volunteer days (6,264 hours). This equates to £45,750 of volunteer assistance*. This can be further broken down as follows:

Coordinated the management of the District's 9 Local Nature Reserves, which involved organising 28 project days involving 2,079 hours of staff and volunteer time. This equates to £19,593.75 of volunteer time.*

Organised 93 practical project days dedicated to improving biodiversity across 40 sites including 21 Local Wildlife Sites. Involved 1039 staff hours and 5197 volunteer hours. This equates to £39,081.25 of volunteer time.*

(* The Heritage Lottery Fund sets rates for volunteer assistance - £6.25/hr for unskilled volunteer labour and £18.75 for skilled labour.)

- Coordinated the Epping Forest Tree Wardens through their 15th year.

Biodiversity, habitat management and creation.

- Working with partners Essex County Council, Woodland Trust, The National Trust, BTCV and City Of London on "Multi For" a three year, €2.49 million European funded woodland project.
- Coordination of the Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan
- Completed the review of District's Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS). Number of LoWS increased from 181 to 222.

- Exceeded the District's target set for National Indicator 197 – Biodiversity and Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS). 46 LoWS achieved positive conservation management status. (Target 35).
- Working with Veolia and EFDC Engineers on the biological enhancement of the former Bobbingworth Landfill Site. Completion of the planting of over 5000 trees and the start of the creation of a 5 ha wildflower meadow.
- Continued the Epping Forest Veteran Tree Hunt. Surveys completed in Ongar, High Laver, Little Laver and Moreton parishes. Total number of trees recorded in the Epping Forest District now stands at 3,266 trees.

Ecological advice on habitat management and protected species

- Established a new system of best practice for Biodiversity and Protected Species with EFDC Development Control Officers. Working to advice laid down by Natural England.

Educational Activities

- Organised 44 walks, talks, events and educational days involving 1,571 participants.
- Worked with 6 schools and over 600 pupils.
- Partnership working with the BBC on their national "Breathing Spaces" Campaign. This included a series of themed walks and events linking in with national initiatives.
- Expanded the team by 3 people by recruiting a Trainee Assistant Countryside Manager and two Future Jobs Fund placements.

External Funding

- Secured £39,144 in external funding for biodiversity projects across for the District from 11 grant applications. Grants awarded by Essex Wildlife Trust, Essex County Council, Tree Council, Rural Communities Council of Essex and DEFRA



Key Projects for 2010/11

Projects	Comments/Objectives
Working with the Community - involvement in Practical Conservation Projects.	To organise 100 practical project days involving over a 6000 volunteer hours in 2010/11. Management coordination of the District's 9 LNRs.
External Funding – Aim to bring in £30,000	Secured to date: i) DEFRA - Hedgerow Grant – £5k ii) Essex County Council - Lambourne Woods Access Improvements – £20K
Gathering evidence base for the Local Development Framework	i) Hedgerow surveys of Matching, Sheering and Moreton. ii) Epping Forest Veteran Tree Survey (see below) iii) Continue to work with partners on the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan and investigate expansion into the rest of the District with an additional plan.
The Epping Forest Veteran Tree Hunt and Hedgerows Surveys - Continue veteran tree survey of the District. Record a further 1,000 trees. (Baseline – Apr 10 = 3226 trees)	i) Undertake a veteran tree survey of the District on a Parish basis. Complete parish surveys in Chigwell, Waltham Abbey, Matching and Sheering. ii) Undertake a hedgerow survey of Matching, Sheering and Moreton funded by DEFRA grant funding.
Local Nature Reserves.	i) Continue to work towards the designation of Norton Heath Common, High Ongar as a Local Nature Reserve. ii) Investigate the designation of Apes Grove Wood with Essex County Council.
Multi For Project	Work with partners Essex County Council to realise access and management improvements to the Lambourne Woods.
Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) NI 197 (Improving biodiversity of LoWS). Secure 73 LoWS in positive conservation management (PCM) by March 2011.	Staff need to work with partners and private landowners to secure positive conservation management of 27 further LoWS in 2010/11 to reach a target of 34% in PCM.
Epping Forest Biodiversity Action Plan	Continue to coordinate and implement the Biodiversity Action Plan for the district in partnership with EFDC's Environmental Coordinator and Steering Group.
Bobbingworth Former Landfill site. Continue to assist with the creation of a pocket park on this Former Landfill site.	Staff to work with EFDC's Land Drainage Section and main contractor Veolia to further improve the sites biological interest with the aim of creating a quality publicly accessible green space.
Ecological Advice to Development Control Officers.	With the withdrawal of standing advice from Natural England on Planning Applications in 2009, Countrycare has worked closely with colleagues in Development Control to ensure Biodiversity and Protected Species is given full consideration in Planning Developments. This important work will continue.