

NEWS RELEASE

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Written by: Tom Bennett, Senior Ranger



Update from the Rangers

We have lots of new and exciting things happening at Stour Valley Nature Reserve and Kingfisher Barn Visitor Centre.

The Rangers:

<https://www.visitstourvalley.co.uk/Visitor-Info/meet-the-team.aspx>

Pollinators:

We will be getting a camera on our bee hive shortly and streaming live footage back to our visitor centre so people can see some of the amazing behaviours of our important resident pollinators.

Conservation Grazing:

We will soon be grazing our newly fenced grassland paddocks along the river so we can increase the diversity of plant species and insects within the Nature Reserve. Conservation grazing is a centuries old and great management technique used by many conservation bodies to manage a huge range of different habitats. In North Bournemouth we graze wet and dry heathland, grassland, bog, wet woodland, scrub areas, reed beds and our internationally important valley moor system. We have left very wide footpaths for site users. These areas aren't grazed to restrict access for people, or to change the look and feel of our sites, they are simply grazed to improve the range of species found within our countryside areas and to keep trying to improve our

Nature Reserves. As a countryside team, it is our responsibility to continue to increase the diversity of our countryside sites.

Visitors:

Interestingly, with responsible visitors, well managed paths, good signage, Ranger patrols, education and access to visitor centres we can have a huge increase in visitor numbers (from 50,000 in 2015 - 120,000 in 2018) and still keep our species numbers increasing too. Yes, we have to install a few new fences to protect certain areas and put in new paths away from the most valuable and vulnerable environmental areas, but it is still very achievable. Our visitors are taking advantage of gaining important access to Nature in an urban setting, improving their own health and wellbeing, taking part in educational events, watching lots of the amazing wildlife, walking dogs, horse riding, walking and cycling. These are all perfect ways of enjoying our countryside sites and should be encouraged. Our visitors contribute to funds held specifically to improve the site, by having a cup of tea or attending an event. By coming into the Visitor Centre, they also learn how important the site is, and how best to care for it whilst out and about.

Species monitoring:

In the last 5 years and beyond we have monitored a huge range of species and recorded a huge amount of data. We run nightly moth traps, weekly butterfly transects, we do annual botanical surveys, regular dragonfly and damselfly recording and recording of freshwater invertebrates. We monitor bird numbers and special sightings, we have guided wildlife walks, we also record lots of the mini beasts we find during our education work with local schools, and to cap that all off, we try and run a bio blitz every couple of years to record as much as possible within a 24hour period. To manage our Nature Reserves we need to know what we have inhabiting them and above are some of the ways we use to gain that vital information.

We don't have public consultation to decide how to manage our sites, but we do however try and work with and accommodate all of our many user groups within everything that we do on site and incorporate ideas into our management plans. We have recently agreed a new Countryside Stewardship agreement with Natural England, so lots of our management work is externally funded and agreed across different organisations.

If you ever have any suggestion or requests, please call into the visitor centre and speak to a Ranger or email Tom.bennett@bcpcouncil.gov.uk

Of course, we will get a small minority of visitors that try and spoil our Nature Reserves for everyone by letting dogs run out of control causing disturbance to wildlife, littering and having bbqs, but the responsible visitors far outweigh the ignorant ones. Out of interest I did the bin round today and found no litter across any of our site at all which tells me we have a huge amount of responsible people coming to our Nature Reserve.

Events:

We have lots of regular events with an emphasis on education, we run nature tots on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 2-4 year olds. Junior Ranger is for 11-15 year olds during the holidays, we also have regular

school groups that visit us and we deliver environmental education sessions to them. We will continue to grow our events and continue to base most of them around education to try and encourage future custodians of our Nature Reserves and the countryside.

Volunteers:

We regularly have 40-50 people per week volunteering just at Stour Valley, they carry out a huge range of work including staffing the visitor centre, running events, delivering practical conservation work, looking after our wildlife garden, monitoring the wildlife on our site, checking cattle, litter picking and much more.

(They're all superstars!)

Sorry that was a long read, please keep visiting us and enjoying our wonderful site.

Tom Bennett
Senior Ranger