Getting close to nature at Wildwood

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Spotting the shy water vole and building hedgehog homes are just a few of the natural pursuits that local volunteers will be able to turn their hands to thanks to an HLF grant of £46,300.

The Trust has also been named as one of 54 UK-wide projects in the HLF's Skills for the Future programme that will be sharing £17m over the next three years. The Trust, which will receive £151,400, will engage four trainees annually in each of the three years with a view to helping them develop careers in the conservation and heritage sectors.

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF South East England Stuart McLeod, said: "Here are twin opportunities for people to use these rich natural resources to engage with wildlife and the environment in new and fascinating ways. Some will do so as volunteers, others will take it on as their employment. Either way, our natural heritage will benefit. This is an excellent way in which to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity 2010."

2010 has been declared as International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) by the United Nations – the year that celebrates the diversity of life on Earth, including every plant, animal and micro-organism.* The UN is asking people to celebrate the enormous variety of wildlife and plant life our world has to offer, whilst also encouraging them to take direct action to safeguard biodiversity and protect it for the enjoyment of future generations.

Natural Heritage at Wildwood project

Locals will have the chance to become involved in a wide range of activities to be organised over the next two years by the Wildwood Trust. With help from the Kent Mammal Group and the Kent Bat Group, a programme of educational events will teach animal identification from tracks and signs, trapping and handling of mammals, and the proper care of endangered species, a number of which are to be found at Wildwood.

These include red squirrels, hazel dormice, water voles, pine martens, great crested newts, rare fungi and butterflies. The volunteers will be trained to help lead public walks and to acquire practical conservation skills including building bird and butterfly feeders, homes for hedgehogs, bees and insects, and creating wildlife habitats from logpiles and dead hedging. An introduction to bat ecology and bat first-aid will also be on offer.

Children and young people will be encouraged to support wildlife in their own neighbourhoods and gardens. As well as using the resources at Wildwood, sites managed by Kent Wildlife Trust, Natural England and Canterbury City Council will also be used as 'outdoor classrooms.'

Volunteers will help the Wildwood Trust to create new interpretation panels and a number of craft events will be run, all aimed at reaching the widest possible audience.

Skills for the Future** offers work-based training in a wide range of skills that are needed to look after buildings, landscapes, habitats, species, and museum and archive collections, as well as equipping people to lead education and outreach programmes, manage volunteers and use new technology. Its focus is on vocational learning, helping meet the skills gaps identified by heritage bodies, and on encouraging potential trainees from all walks of life. Trainees will learn how to engage families, schools and communities with their heritage, bringing heritage sites and collections alive for the next generation.

For the Wildwood Trust, Fundraising Projects Manager Beth Flowers said: “Wildwood is thrilled to be working with the Heritage Lottery Fund to provide Heritage Skills at Wildwood. We will be delivering a three-year scheme to engage four trainees per annum in endangered species conservation and ancient woodland management. The project will focus on bringing in new young people, and increasing the diversity of the workforce in the natural conservation sector in Kent, so new people can participate in the quality work-based training our experienced heads of departments can provide.”

Notes to editors

* Skills for the Future is a one-off HLF programme supporting organisations across the UK to create new training places. An investment of £17m is being made in 54 projects throughout the country. This money will deliver 808 placements and adds-up to an impressive 780 years’ worth of paid training opportunities for people across the UK seeking a career in heritage. Grants range from £100,000 to £1million over a period of up to five years with an emphasis on high-quality work-based training.

** 2010 has been declared as International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) by the United Nations – the year that celebrates the diversity of life on Earth, including every plant, animal and micro-organism. HLF is supporting IYB. The diversity of life on earth is crucial for human wellbeing and now is the time to act to preserve it. www.biodiversityislife.net

The Wildwood Trust is a charity dedicated to the restoration of Britain’s wildlife, past and present. Set in 37 acres of ancient woodland and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, the Trust focuses on wildlife conservation, through the promotion of conservation schemes and award winning educational programmes. Wildwood Trust has developed a number of highly successful reintroduction programmes for native endangered species, including the red squirrel, the hazel dormouse and the water vole, in partnership with wildlife trusts across the UK. It has also developed conservation grazing systems using horses and beavers to restore natural ecological processes. Some 9000 school children visit Wildwood each year.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, with over £428 million granted in the South East alone.

Further information

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