Nature reserve defies the odds

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After much hard work, planning and consultation, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), has awarded the nature reserve £600,000 for a five-year project that will rebuild and extend the visitor centre, expand volunteering opportunities once again, and bring the local community together with the natural world just beyond their doorstep.

Encompassing 10.6 hectares of land and located a few miles from Birmingham City Centre, RSPB Sandwell Valley was first designated as a local nature reserve and site of importance for nature conservation in 1991. It is home to over 200 species of bird, 250 species of vascular plants, as well as many identified butterfly species.

The RSPB opened the doors to Sandwell Valley nature reserve almost 30 years ago to get wildlife and nature back to Birmingham and Black Country, and to give local people a great experience with nature. This project will see Sandwell Valley become a vibrant and much treasured natural asset ensuring its long term future as a place for everyone, for generations to come.

Reyahn King, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands said: “We are delighted to be able to help the RSPB overcome adversity to bring the visitor offer at Sandwell Valley back into the limelight.

“The new HLF funded centre will provide greatly improved infrastructure and provide a hub for a huge programme of activities, events and education classes to be delivered over the coming years. It will foster connections with new people including youth clubs, community groups, families and schools, as well as giving resident and visiting nature a home.”

The funding will enable RSPB to run an exciting range of activities, including photography, bush crafts and orienteering. Many volunteers will be needed to help with the project, which will create some great opportunities for people to learn new skills while helping people to connect with the natural world.

Since the fire, the reserve has only been able to offer limited facilities. Chris Edwards, Visitor Officer for the RSPB, says: “Immediately after the fire we were all feeling pretty low. The closure of the centre not only greatly affected RSPB staff but also our loyal volunteers who had worked so hard to make the reserve welcoming.

“I received many words of support from our regular visitors both near and far. This is an exciting time for the reserve and friends – the new visitor centre is going to open new doors to people who may not otherwise have close contact to the amazing nature on their doorstep – we can't wait!”

While the nature reserve is a special place for people, the RSPB and a team of dedicated volunteers are constantly making efforts to make more homes for wild visitors, from breeding lapwings and oystercatchers to butterflies, moths and bats.

Dr Stefan Bodnar, warden at RSPB Sandwell Valley, says: “Our volunteer teams from Sandwell reserve and Birmingham University recently built two large state of the art floating nesting platforms at the Sandwell Valley RSPB reserve. The large floating wooden platforms were covered with gravel and shingle and anchored in Forge Mill Lake.

“These wild havens soon became home to summer visitors – common terns – who already in the first year, are using them to breed on. The funding is great news and will help attract more volunteers – and in turn, more wildlife than ever

before!”

The new centre will be open in Spring 2015. In the meantime, RSPB Sandwell Valley is still very much open for business and visitors can explore sights and smells of a special place for people and wildlife.

Notes to editors

The RSPB is the UK’s largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. We play a leading role in BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations. Visit the RSPB website for further detail.

Further information

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