Time to celebrate at WWT Castle Espie

25/06/2010

The wetland centre is situated only 12 miles from Belfast City centre but, in terms of tranquility, feels a million miles away. Many happy customers have passed through the doors over the years and importantly, returned many times over, helping to establish the venue as Ireland's premier wetland centre.

Helping celebrate the redevelopment to date at Castle Espie, key funders joined national and local journalists to gain a sneak preview on the close to completion project. Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the main project funder, attended a special press event today (Friday 25 June) to highlight the history and heritage linked with the County Down landmark.

The day included a walking tour of the site charting the history from tropical Lough to Mesolithic times, its Victorian industrial heyday when the site was a major brick and lime quarry and onwards to present day.

To make a connective link with the past, costumed serving staff and a Mesolithic man set the scene, while a specially commissioned dive team searched a flooded quarry for relics and delighted all by producing fabulous footage of their findings.

Dame Jenny Abramsky, said: "Three years ago the Heritage Lottery Fund gave the WWT a grant of nearly £3million to restore this precious wildlife sanctuary so it's wonderful to be here today to see the transformation. The WWT has been truly visionary in its work, particularly with regards to restoring the salt and freshwater area and limestone grasslands as well as the construction of new paths and an award-winning eco-friendly visitor centre. We are really proud to be the main funder of this project; Castle Espie is undoubtedly one of the jewels in Northern Ireland's heritage crown and we hope its future will now be secure for many more years to come."

Culminating in a grand celebration weekend event, it was a time to officially light the beeswax candles as the WWT Centre marks 20 years on Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th June. A special family fun-filled weekend complemented by 1990 admission prices is expected to bring in the crowds.

Boasting Ireland's largest collection of wildfowl, Castle Espie is one of nine WWT (Wildfowl & Wetland Trust) centres across the UK. It has become synonymous with protecting wetlands and their habitats locally and globally for future generations.

As current holder of the (NIEA) Northern Ireland Environment Agency / Sustainable Ireland Sustainable Building of the Year and more recently the recipient of two further awards in the same category from (RSUA) Royal Society of Ulster Architects and (RICS) Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, these all highlight the importance of the new building and its environs and the importance of the centre as a leader in sustainability and conservation.

Castle Espie Wetland Centre is open daily from 10.30am, closed Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. For further details call 028 9187 4146 or go to www.wwt.org.uk/castleespie

Access to the car park, Loughshore Café, Castle Espie Retail shop and Graffan Gallery is free but normal admission applies to the wetlands.

Notes to editors

WWT is a leading UK conservation organisation saving wetlands for wildlife and people across the world. With over 60 years experience of wetland conservation, WWT is committed to the protection of wetlands and all that depend on them for survival.

WWT operates nine specialist wetland visitor centres in the UK that are visited by some one million people every year from around the world. The centres provide a place to walk, relax, learn, and get closer to nature. Over 60,000 children benefit every year from educational visits to a WWT centre.

In total over 2,000 hectares are managed by WWT, including seven Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), one Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), six Special Protection Areas (SPA), Part of one Marine Nature Reserve and six Ramsar sites, supporting over 200,000 waterbirds.

WWT members enjoy free access to all nine visitor centres and are kept up to date with developments through a quarterly magazine.

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 form 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 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4 billion across the UK.

Further information

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