Sir David Attenborough celebrates new dawn for



Sir David Attenborough opens the new pathway Andi Sapey

Taking the first steps along the path as it officially opened to the public, Sir David was joined by Connor Lonergan and Sasha Carter-Lonergan, who volunteer at the Simon Aspinall Wildlife Education Centre to engage more young people with wildlife.

Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) purchased the missing stretch of land in 8km of protected coastal sites in 2012, thanks to a £900,000 public appeal and a grant of over £1.5million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The land - 143 acres - sits between its nature reserve at Salthouse Marshes, and NWT's flagship reserve, Cley Marshes. Cley Marshes is one of the world's leading bird-watching destinations and is a historic jewel in The Wildlife Trusts' crown – it was The Wildlife Trusts' first ever nature reserve when it was acquired in 1926.

Over the last three years the new land has been transformed from its former use as land for commercial shooting. Now the once-degraded pools have been restored and reed beds created, which are already being used by breeding avocets. They are welcome habitat for many other rare species too including marsh harriers, bitterns, bearded tits, otters and water voles.

Sir David was joined by BBC broadcaster and Ambassador of NWT, Ben Garrod, in the afternoon to officially open the brand new education centre at Cley Marshes, which will serve to connect people to this fantastic landscape through a range of events.

From performance poetry to Tai Chi at sunrise, Norfolk Wildlife Trust's new education centre at Cley Marshes is leading the way in enabling people to connect with the wild.

As well as more traditional methods to engage people with wildlife – such as guided walks on the nature reserve and talks by respected naturalists – NWT is now able to offer a much wider range of activities to inspire a fascination and love for the natural world.

Chief Executive of NWT, Brendan Joyce, said: "Our new events programme is for those who know a lot, a little or nothing about wildlife. It's for those who love art and music as much as those who enjoy wild spaces. The new education centre will help thousands of people from across the UK get closer to nature every year – both through wildlife events and also with highly creative activities."

The Simon Aspinall Wildlife Education Centre has been built behind NWT's successful visitor centre at their flagship nature reserve. It was made possible thanks to an appeal to NWT's membership, the public and support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It was designed by LSI Architects and is named in memory of local naturalist, Simon Aspinall.

The centre was officially opened on Friday 12 June by Sir David Attenborough and BBC Broadcaster and NWT Ambassador, Ben Garrod. They met some of the many people who have been inspired creatively by Cley Marshes: including young film-makers from City College, Norwich; and children from Sistema Norwich, a ground-breaking project that improves the lives of some of the city's most deprived children through participation in music. They also met with some of NWT's volunteers, who are so vital to the success of the centre.

NWT Ambassador, Ben Garrod said: "I grew up watching Norfolk's amazing wildlife: bearded tits in the reed beds, marine wildlife off our beautiful coastline… I can even remember the first time I saw a marsh harrier at Cley gliding through the vast skies. These are our wild places, our wildlife and this fantastic new centre will enable everyone to develop their own wild life, whether its art, music, workshops, film or crafts that floats their boat!"

Inga Grimsey, Chair of the HLF East of England Committee, said: "Another piece of the jigsaw has been placed connecting Norfolk's amazingly important natural heritage coastline, and we're delighted it has been achieved with money raised by National Lottery players. Not only has this project enhanced an already popular and beautiful place but will also ensure people can continue to learn about and be inspired by the area, particularly the future custodians of our wonderful natural heritage."

Notes to editors

About the Norfolk Wildlife Trust

NWT manages over 50 nature reserves and other protected sites around the county including ten kilometres of coastline, nine Norfolk broads, nine National Nature Reserves and five ancient woodlands.

The Trust seeks a sustainable environment for people and wildlife: where the future of wildlife is protected and enhanced through sympathetic management; and people are connected with and inspired by Norfolk's wildlife and wild spaces. For more information visit the Norfolk Wildlife Trust website.

Further information

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