

Putting the ecology into Eco-Island

Town and parish councils and the NERC duty – how do you FARE?

You are passionate about your area and part of your job is make sure that the community plays a full and active part in making it an even better place to live.

The Island's landscape and natural and historic environments provide the backdrop to our lives, and every time people are asked what they like the most about living on the Island the environment comes out top. Time spent in natural surroundings is known to promote a positive outlook on life and enhance our ability to cope with and recover from stress, illness and injury.

Nature is a catalyst for communities to come together – a local project can provide an opportunity to bring people together in a common aim, to share in a new experience and make friends. Involvement in a project to improve the wildlife of an area helps the community to develop respect and responsibility for their surroundings, and reduces problems of vandalism.

So what can a town or parish council do?

Find out what is there already

The Isle of Wight Local Environmental Records Centre can tell you:

- Whether there are any sites designated for wildlife in your parish,
- What species of wildlife are known to be there.

Email: Irc@iow.gov.uk

You may have people living locally who are experts - birdwatchers or botanists for example - who can add to this information.

Appreciate your local environment

Organise a walk round the parish taking in local viewpoints and interesting features. There are sure to be local people with a wealth of information or you can ask advice from the ecologists. Try this at different seasons for a year round view.

Email: ecology@iow.gov.uk

Some parishes have gone on to produce self-guided trails and leaflets or interpretation boards. See web sites of Brading, Freshwater, Totland, Whippingham and Wootton parish councils.

Record what is in your local area

National schemes like Springwatch, Autumnwatch and the Big Garden Birdwatch have encouraged people to take an interest in various species. Northwood Parish Council has an online map of wildlife sightings.

Enhance your area

Once the community has become enthusiastic about its surroundings, encourage it to do more.

- As individuals – in the form of attractive wildlife friendly gardening for example,
- As a parish project – there are ideas mentioned above but if there is land which the parish council owns or looks after, encouraging wildlife could be one of your aims.

To do this you will need to develop a plan which:

- Takes account of what is there already,
- Sets out what you intend to do, and how you will do it,
- Involves the local community,
- Describes how the area will be looked after in the long-term.

A good plan will motivate your community and help to bring in some funds to carry it out. Various sources of advice are available. See www.wildonwight.co.uk.

Find out more

- www.wildonwight.co.uk/datasearches.php
- www.brading.gov.uk
- www.freshwater-parish.org.uk/walk.php
- www.totlandparishcouncil.org.uk/index.html
- www.whippingham.org.uk
- www.woottonbridge.com/countryside.aspx
- www.bbc.co.uk/springwatch
- www.bbc.co.uk/earth/nature/uk/autumnwatch
- <http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch>
- www.northwoodvillage.org.uk/village/naturalhistory/default.aspx