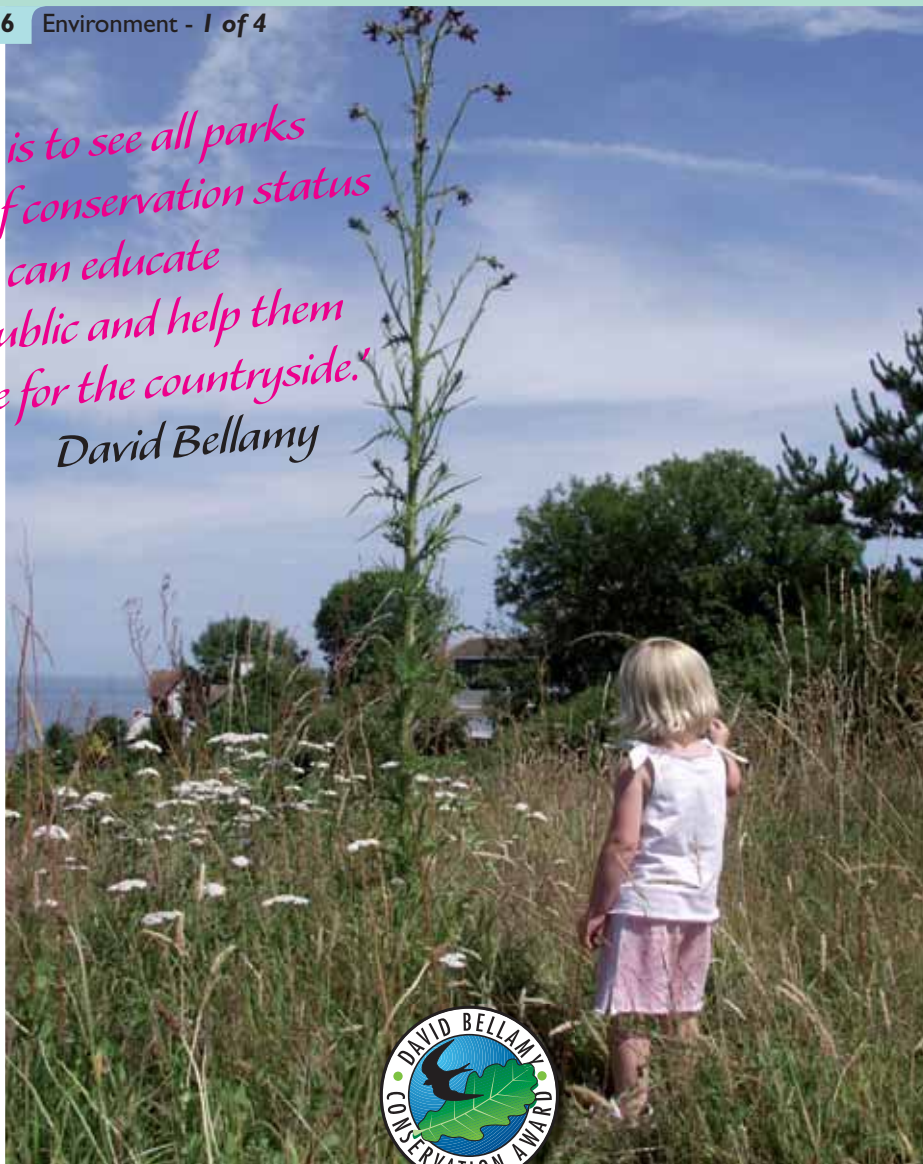


'My dream is to see all parks with some sort of conservation status so that they can educate the visiting public and help them respect and care for the countryside.'
 David Bellamy



David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme 2010



Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management, explains why it is a great time for members to join the Scheme and encourages more parks to go for Gold

Last year, more than 600 parks received a David Bellamy Conservation Award for the work done to protect and enhance Britain's natural environment. The variety and scope of projects these parks carry out is phenomenal - from the creation of new wildlife meadows and woodlands to the construction of solar-powered shower blocks and energy-efficient lodges, they are leading the way for sustainable tourism in the UK.

Background

The David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme (DBCAS) is one of the longest running green tourism awards in the UK. The idea of the Scheme was first sown when David Bellamy addressed delegates at BH&HPA's 1996 conference at which he challenged the industry to be part of the environmental solution and not part of the problem. David was then invited to visit many parks and was amazed at the wide range of work that the most forward-thinking owners were doing for the environment.

David was so impressed that a partnership was formed to set up an Award Scheme.

The Scheme started in 1996 and as is the case today, assessors for the Scheme were drawn from local Wildlife Trusts and other local conservation bodies. The idea behind the Awards has also remained the same since those early days: to celebrate what parks are doing for the British countryside and to encourage others to follow their lead. One of the first comments David made about the Scheme remains true today: *'My dream is to see all parks with some sort of conservation status so that they can educate the visiting public and help them respect and care for the countryside.'*

In the years since it was set up, the DBCAS has grown in scope and stature and has even inspired similar award schemes abroad - most notable the Gumnut award scheme in Australia, which plays a similar role in that country's camping and caravanning world. The Scheme has developed organically, but saw a major revision of its judging criteria in 2007/8. This was done to acknowledge the increasing importance of sustainability

issues such as energy saving on both the industry, public and governmental agendas. With more businesses realising that being green is something that is well worth doing, the future of the Scheme looks set to be as exciting and innovative as its past.

Registration for the 2010 Scheme is now open so read on to find out more about what the Scheme can offer to BH&HPA members.

How does the Scheme work?

The aim of the Scheme is to celebrate the environmental work that parks do, encourage them to improve and support them as they do. To do this, parks are awarded either a Gold, Silver or Bronze Award based on their performance in the three main areas of environmental activity:

- ecological management (what they do to help wildlife)
- sustainability (what they do to conserve resources, save energy and reduce waste)
- good neighbourliness (what they do to support their local community and economy).

A park's environmental performance is judged on information from three main sources:

- the information park owners and managers supply in an easy-to-complete self-assessment form. This gives the opportunity to let us know what they have been doing for the environment
- an on-park assessment completed by one of the Scheme's assessors
- feedback we receive from members of the public.

Holidaymakers and park residents are encouraged to let us know what they think about parks involved in the Award Scheme. They can do this through the Scheme's website (www.bellamyparks.co.uk) or by sending their comments to us on a postcard, which we provide for BH&HPA members to distribute to the park's customers.

The assessments are the central element of the judging process and they usually take place during June and July. The assessors are drawn from organisations such as the local Wildlife Trusts, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, or from the countryside department of local county councils. All are local natural history experts, committed to the conservation of the British countryside.

When an assessor visits a park, they will talk through various aspects of the park's environmental work and tour the park. In general the assessors will be looking for two main things:

- evidence that the park has acted to improve its environmental performance, e.g. the management of grasslands to encourage wild flowers, or the installation of push-button taps to save water
- evidence that these actions have resulted in improvements, such as an abundance of wild flowers or an improvement in energy efficiency.

Overall, assessors will be looking for evidence of a commitment to and enthusiasm for environmental improvement. Each assessor submits a written report to David Bellamy. This will contain an overview of the park's strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for how park owners and managers can move forward and improve their performance. A copy of this report will be sent to the park with an Award notification. Results are announced to parks in October.

New feature

An initial assessment is carried out when a park joins the Scheme and every fifth year thereafter. However, a new feature from 2010 is that current Bronze and Silver Award parks will be automatically assessed after three years of continuous participation. This change has been introduced to give Silver and Bronze parks more support and guidance. As before, these parks can request an interim assessment at any time. Many parks do this if they consider that the changes and initiatives they have implemented since their last assessment will improve their current Award status. Parks that have achieved the Gold standard are assessed every year.

Why join?

Environmental issues are becoming ever more important for everyone. However, the environmental challenge is particularly relevant to parks for three main reasons:

- a wildlife-rich environment on a park provides a beautiful and interesting place for holidaymakers and residents. It enhances the 'holiday experience' and makes people return. In short, boosting biodiversity is good for business *continued...*



Tackling concerns

Is it for us?

Many parks ask whether the David Bellamy Award Scheme is for them. In fact, the Scheme is open to any park that is a member of BH&HPA. Almost every type of park is currently represented amongst the Award winners - from hideaway places, where visitors enjoy a real 'back-to-nature' holiday experience, to larger 'leisure parks' with swimming pools and other large-scale facilities. The only factor which matters is whether a park is committed to working to improve its environmental performance.

Are we too small?

Size is not an issue for the Award Scheme. We work with the whole range of parks from small touring and tenting right through to parks with hundreds of holiday homes. Indeed, the Scheme's assessors are asked to make their decisions based on how well a park is performing within the context of its size and resources - in other words, on how well it is making use of the landscape, staff and financial resources at its disposal and on how well it is overcoming the specific challenges it faces. If certain issues or actions are not applicable to a park (e.g. enhancing riverbank habitats where none exist), then the park will, obviously, not be penalised for inaction.

What if we haven't done enough?

Many parks worry that the Scheme is only for those that can demonstrate the highest level of environmental excellence. Such parks are the stalwarts of the Scheme and are awarded 'Golds'; however the Scheme is very keen to welcome parks that are just starting off. Most parks already have parts of their grounds that are of value to wildlife and are doing some things to reduce their environmental impact. Bronze Awards are given to parks that have met such an 'entry level' of performance. Our assessors love working with such parks to help them rapidly improve their environmental performance and move up to Silver and then on to Gold - so for any park just starting out, we are here to help.

We don't know anything about the environment?

We provide all parks which enter the Scheme with comprehensive guidance notes on how to improve their environmental performance. It is therefore a great way to start thinking and learning about environmental management. The guidance notes can be used to draw up a checklist of things to do and will point park owners and managers in the direction of extra information and advice. They are supported by a comprehensive website and regular environmental articles in BH&HPA's Journal. The assessor will provide further guidance and information during the park visit and in the assessment report.

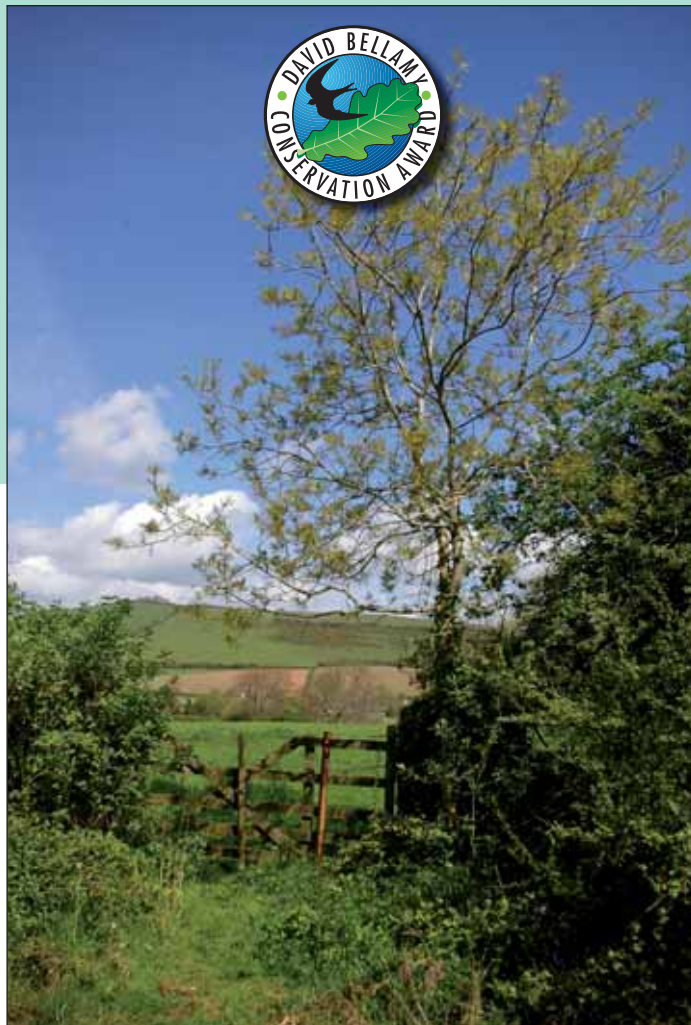
We own a residential park so is the Scheme relevant to us?

Residential parks can benefit from the Scheme. They can use it to help create a real feeling of community spirit. If residents are given the opportunity to play their part in improving the environmental performance of their park by, for example, saving energy, recycling and tending their gardens to encourage wildlife, then everyone can feel part of the winning team when the park gets an Award.

How much time will it take?

Working to improve a park's environmental performance takes time and commitment, but it's definitely worth it. Participation in the DBCAS will also take some time investment from park owners and managers and their staff, but if it is used as a mechanism to focus and plan environmental work then it could actually save effort. With regards to the assessment itself, please be prepared to set aside anywhere between two and three hours

for the assessor's visit. It's important to make sure that a park representative is available to meet the assessor, answer questions and conduct a tour of the park. However, keep in mind that this is an opportunity to let us know what the park has been doing.



■ parks that reduce their environmental impact by reducing the amount of energy, water and other resources they use and waste they produce can benefit from reduced utility bills and other costs

■ customer demand for 'green' options when choosing a holiday destination means that parks are increasingly being asked what they are doing for the environment.

The Scheme helps parks meet the environmental challenge and so benefit from the opportunities it presents. In particular, the Scheme provides participants with:

- a marketing edge and a way of publicising what they are doing for the environment
- an incentive to assess their park's environmental performance and a series of environmental targets and goals to aim for
- information and assistance to move forward.

Marketing benefits

One of the key benefits of signing up to the DBCAS is that it gives a park an extra something to make its marketing stand out from the crowd. It's a way of letting potential customers know that the park has something special to offer.

As we highlighted in the May-June 2009 Journal how to maximise the marketing benefits of the Scheme, the great thing about the Award is that it is an instantly recognisable name that is linked in the public mind to environmental excellence. BH&HPA PR Adviser Jon Boston sums up the value of this aspect of the Award Scheme succinctly:

'Even if a customer couldn't tell a reed bed from a bunk bed, he or she will definitely recognise David Bellamy's name as a well-known TV personality. And it's this famous figure who is recommending a park as a great place to live or stay.'

To gauge the impact and importance of the DBCAS, just do a quick Google search. This shows that lots of parks get good press coverage because of their Awards. 'Park wins Gold Award', 'David Bellamy Salutes Park' and 'Holiday Parks are Tops' are just three recent examples of parks that have got into their local newspapers (and their websites) because they have achieved success in the Scheme.

Incentives and support

One of the key benefits of the DBCAS is that it gives parks a framework for improving their environmental performance. As anyone who has faced a deadline knows, it is often easier to get things done when there is a target to aim for. Getting an Award also acts as a really great 'pat on the back' which motivates staff to carry on coming up with good environmental ideas and projects.

The assessor's visit obviously provides a key milestone to aim for each year, but the assessor's report also provides a more detailed range of suggestions for action which can be turned into an annual 'things-to-do' plan.

To support this work, the Scheme provides lots of advice and information. Alongside the comprehensive guidance notes and website provided to all participants, the Scheme assessors are also an invaluable source of information. They are there to help parks and provide support and are happy to advise park owners and managers on how to improve their 'green performance', and will have useful local contacts that may also be able to help.

For further information or to take part in the 2010 Award Scheme, please contact Caroline Beard or Gill Thirlwell at BH&HPA central office on 01452 526911 or email enquiries@bhpha.org.uk.

