



# Ten steps to success



Photograph taken by the first recipient of Michael Ward's Conservation Ambassador Award, Elaine Gandy

## Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management, reveals ten steps towards achieving an Award

David Bellamy announced the latest results of the David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme (DBCAS): *'The Scheme started off over 15 years ago when I realised that the best parks out there were doing really great things for the environment. They were not just thinking about the bottom line, but were investing in their most important resource: biodiversity. They were planting trees, re-instating hedges, creating wildlife meadows and wetlands and many other things to put wild flowers and other wildlife back where they used to be when I first went camping. All I had to do was pat them on the back and so the Bellamy Awards were born!'*

David is proud that there are almost 630 parks in the Scheme today and with more people choosing holidays with a green flavour (as shown by the 'environmental' search filters built into holiday search engines), they all get a real marketing boost out of being part of the Scheme.

As well as being a marketing tool directed at prospective customers, a park's involvement in the Scheme brings a whole raft of other benefits. Most importantly, it gives a focus for

park environmental improvements. This not only helps wildlife (the main emphasis for the Scheme), but also makes parks more beautiful and interesting for their visitors and residents. Going green can also help parks reduce the amount of resources they use and so bring long-term cost savings on utility bills etc. Many parks, for example, have found that it is cheaper to recycle and have saved significant sums of money by plugging leaks and saving energy. What's more, the Award can also help improve community relations and positively influence local decision makers, such as planning officers. Many parks also say that the Award is a great morale-booster for employees, as it acknowledges and rewards their efforts.

Here are 10 inspirational ideas to consider for members who want to take a step towards getting an Award, but also for parks that are already part of the Scheme and would like to improve and aim for a Gold or one of the 'Special Distinction' Awards - given to parks that have come up with a really innovative 'best practice' idea from which other parks can learn.



### Maintenance staff using staff bicycles at Kelling Heath



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## Get an environmental champion and a 'green team'

One of the most important things to do is to give somebody the responsibility of improving the park's environmental performance. *'I definitely think you need someone in charge,'* says Nicola Badley, who is Environmental Officer at Kelling Heath and Woodhill Park in North Norfolk. *'Before I arrived, the countryside teams managed things very well, but when someone is leading, you can move things up a gear. A green champion is important to do research, share information and drive the whole process along.'*

Like many park environmental managers, Nicola draws together green teams made up of park employees to put environmental plans into action. Nicola's teams are made up of one person from each department, staff who aren't supervisors or managers, but people who do day-to-day tasks and are therefore actively involved in putting any 'green plans' into action. Nicola explains that her teams have quarterly meetings to focus on key points, share ideas and see how ideas would work on the ground. *'For example, at our recent meeting we discussed reusing carrier bags and bird feeders,'* she says. *'We decided that rather than using shop-bought fat balls, we would get people to make their own.'*

### The 'green team' at Kelling Heath and Woodhill Park



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## Train staff to go green

Another equally active park environmental champion is Maz Howard from Wild Duck Holiday Park. According to Maz, among the main challenges involved in getting a green team together are training, keeping everyone aware of what is expected and motivating staff to contribute their time and ideas. *'Our induction process includes green training so that team members can see why we recycle, turn off lights, pick up litter and nurture our wildlife and I think they quickly see that this benefits everyone,'* she says. The park also offers incentives to its teams to encourage them to be green. *'Our maintenance team receive financial incentives for recycling metal. This in turn reduces the park's own costs as metal is now rarely put into our general skips, which are charged for on weight, and everyone wins.'* Many parks find that getting staff involved in improving a park's environmental performance is a key way to motivate them and get them really engaged with a park's management. *'Our involvement in the DBCAS has without doubt improved the way that we manage our parks,'* says Michael Ward the owner of Merlewood Country Park and Acresfield near Lancaster. *'All of our team feel that they are actively involved in creating a green legacy for the future. We tell all our staff: "Be proactive; the future is yours to create".'*

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## Plan, prioritise and set targets

Having a committed green team is, of course, only half of the story. To really move a park forward from an environmental point of view, it is important to plan and prioritise any work to ensure that resources are well used and that all projects give maximum returns – both in terms of boosting biodiversity, and also in terms of reducing utility bills and enhancing the holiday experience for visitors.

This is another area where the Scheme can help as it not only provides a yearly milestone or target to aim for, but can also help give a structure to a park's environmental work. *'The Scheme is separated into clear sections and so slots neatly into my management system,'* says Kelling Heath's Nicola Badley. Nicola has a computer-based environmental management system that covers all key topics such as energy, water, waste, planning and transport. For Nicola, one of the key benefits of the Scheme is its focus on the ecological management of green space, alongside resource conservation and other sustainability issues.

Environmental management involves reviewing where a park has got to and then prioritising activity and setting targets (e.g. improvements in energy efficiency or water use) to give the most efficient and effective results. Nicola's advice is to start by going for the 'low-hanging fruits': *'Once you have got round the "easy wins" you get a grasp of what can be done,'* she says, giving the example of the work her green teams have been doing to reduce the impact of paper use in park offices. *'The green teams started off by being a little unsure about how to proceed, so we started with simple things like double-sided printing. We've now progressed to more complex solutions like using document scanners to move towards a truly electronic office.'* **continued...**

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## Incorporate green issues into everyday management

At Wild Duck, one of Maz's key recommendations is to make sure that the environment is made a part and parcel of a park's general management. *'We run in the same way as any other caravan park, but include environmentally-friendly practices in day-to-day administration,'* she says. *'We aren't all tree-huggers (although I have been called that in the past!) and we don't sit in endless green meetings, but when a choice is to be made, a greener choice is usually considered.'* Maz explains that the first step to reducing a park's environmental footprint is simply being aware of the resources it uses. She is now looking carefully at her park's purchasing policy to see how the park can buy more environmentally-friendly products and services.

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## Get central support

The support of park owners and managers is one of the key elements of a successful green plan. Many larger environmental projects require long-term planning and considerable investment – whether it's a reed-bed sewage treatment system or a park-wide tree planting project. If the park is committed to being really green – and is basing part of its consumer appeal and marketing strategy on this issue – then larger investments can be more easily justified and supported.

Maz highlights the importance of a central commitment to 'going green'. *'Bourne Leisure (which owns Wild Duck) really backs the green side of things and it is a key element for all the company's parks,'* says Maz. *'All of the parks have green teams and we are guided by Daniel Coward our Environmental Adviser at head office in all we do. For example, he is currently helping us with new leaflets and signage for our new lake project.'*

*Launch day of the Coasthopper Xtra service: (l to r) Nicola Badley, Kelling Heath's Environmental Officer, Ben Colson, Director of Norfolk Green and Sarah Nichols, Guest Services and Events Co-ordinator*



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## Don't ignore the simple options

Not all environmental projects are large-scale. Indeed, one of the great things about environmental work is that it doesn't have to be complex and costly to have an impact. Often the most effective ideas are among the most simple. Take the work that's being done at the Cobleland, Forest Holiday's park in Stirlingshire. This park is very enthusiastic about conservation, and it uses discreet 'green owl' signs to advise people to do a whole range of environmentally-friendly things, from turning off taps when cleaning teeth and switching off lights to taking the bus instead of the car.

*'We thought about the concept of a wise owl giving snippets of messages that are easy to read,'* says the park's Manager Lesley Logan. *'We put up small laminated pictures of owls, made using clip art on the computer, next to taps, near toilets and other places around the park.'* The Cobleland owls are simple to produce and the message can be updated to keep it fresh. As Lesley says, *'Our main aim was to communicate important information in a fun way which would attract the attention of everyone especially our younger visitors who seem to be increasingly more interested in green issues. People feel that it's the owl giving the message not the park, the children especially love them and run around trying to find the next one.'*

Other relatively simple ideas put in place at Cobleland include a bag recycler in the dishwashing area so people can pass on their bags for others to use. The park also uses a whole host of relatively simple devices to feed and attract wildlife to the park, such as sponge nectar feeders for insects, ladybird boxes and small bug boxes. That doesn't mean everything on the park is on a small scale – Lesley and her team have also set up a large bug hotel alongside plenty of bird feeders that have been strategically placed around the park.

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## Take any opportunities that present themselves

Of course not all green challenges are easily solved. They can require a lot of tenacity and a willingness to jump at opportunities as they present themselves. One park that shows what can be done is Three Ponds Holiday Park which nestles beneath the South Downs. *'When we set up the business the council wouldn't recycle for us; their trucks would do the houses in front of our park, but not the park itself,'* says park Manager Joanne Barlow. *'They kept saying "we can't do it", even when we offered to pay to set things up.'* For Joanne the breakthrough came when she read an article in a local magazine that the council had been given a grant to expand recycling. *'I contacted the council and they visited us and saw where we could set up a community recycling facility and within a couple of weeks it was in.'*

The park's recycling is now set up in a screened area where locals can put in their rubbish without driving on to the park and visitors can dump their recyclables as they leave. The park now recycles paper, bottles, cans, plastics and cardboard (the only part it pays for). *'It was definitely the "community" element that allowed us to get the service,'* says Joanne. *'However, it was important to get someone at the council on side – once they visited us and understood what we wanted to do, we could move forward. We now have an excellent working relationship with the council and they help us every time there is a glitch.'*



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## Get outside help

As Three Ponds shows, getting other organisations on board and using available external resources is a key way of ensuring success. Places to look for such help and advice include the local wildlife trust or countryside ranger service. *'We take advice from our local Countryside Rangers on any of our major initiatives and we like to involve children from local schools,'* says Michael Ward. *'On Acresfield we are creating a new conservation area which children from a local Junior School have adopted for their own projects.'*

Help can also come from other businesses involved in tourism. For example, visitors to Kelling Heath Holiday Park, in north Norfolk, are now able to travel around and explore the coast without using their cars when the park became part of the Coasthopper bus network, which serves the north Norfolk coastal area. Michael Timewell, Director of Kelling Heath Holiday Park, said: *'We approached Norfolk Green, which operates Coasthopper, to discuss the possibility of adding Kelling Heath to its route. What we wanted was a convenient, regular service that would give our visitors the option of leaving their cars on the park whilst still being able to travel around and explore the area.'*

This scheme has already brought green benefits. Nicola Badley, Kelling Heath's Environmental Officer, says: *'The Coasthopper service means that park visitors can really do their bit for the environment by leaving their cars on the park and hopping on a bus to access the coastal area. The resulting reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from car travel will be very positive for the whole area and we hope Kelling Heath visitors will get on board and use the service regularly.'*

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## Involve park visitors and residents

Park visitors and residents can be another source of help. For example, many parks find that they have wildlife experts amongst their visitors and can get their help to record the animals and plants that make their homes within their boundaries. Visitors and owners are also a key player in any resource conservation project, as they are the people who must turn off taps, switch off lights or recycle.

At Merlewood, Michael Ward is encouraging owners to get involved by awarding them for the work they do to help in the park's quest to be green. *'We are creating our own special Conservation Ambassador Award. This will be presented to an owner who has over the years been actively involved in either their own project or has supported one of our conservation initiatives,'* he explains. *'The first recipient will be Elaine Gandy for her superb wildlife photography taken during the early hours of the morning close to her holiday home.'*

The best way to motivate visitors and residents to do their bit is, according to Michael, to lead from the front. *'To act by example is the most important thing to consider when managing a good happy park,'* he advises. *'If a park is kept meticulously clean and tidy at all times then the holiday home owners/residential park home owners are more likely to follow suit.'*

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## Assess success

One of the key benefits of the DBCAS is that it provides a great way of assessing how things are going. It is both a milestone to aim for and a stepping stone for future progress. *'Each year we get the reports and I discuss them with my green team and grounds staff,'* says Wild Duck's Maz Howard. *'We also do a leaflet to let people know how things have built up. For example, this year Wild Duck's 'How Green Are We' newsletter let everyone know about everything the park had achieved, including the fact that head office had assisted it to create a guided nature walk and that it had achieved a 19% saving in fuel costs.'*

Assessment is also key for Michael Ward at Merlewood. *'There is no point in initiating a scheme when you have no idea whether or not it has been or indeed whether it continues to be a success,'* he says. *'You have to be prepared to make adjustments and improvements to any of your projects.'*

This idea of continuous improvement is just what David set out to promote when he set up the Award Scheme – by patting parks on the back for all the hard work they had put in, he hoped to spur them on to further heights. Fast forward to 15 years later and this vision has proved its worth and parks around the country continue to improve their environmental performance. Why not join their number? ●



Photograph by Elaine Gandy