

Make 2018 the year to go for Gold

Rufus Bellamy, BH&HPA National Adviser on conservation and environmental management explains the benefits of going green

With spring on its way, it is an exciting time to be making plans for the year ahead. For at least 550 parks around the country, part of that planning involves deciding what to do for this year's David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme (DBCAS).

The steps they are going to take will involve supporting Britain's wildlife, reducing their impact on the environment and being good neighbours to the people around them.

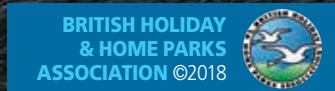
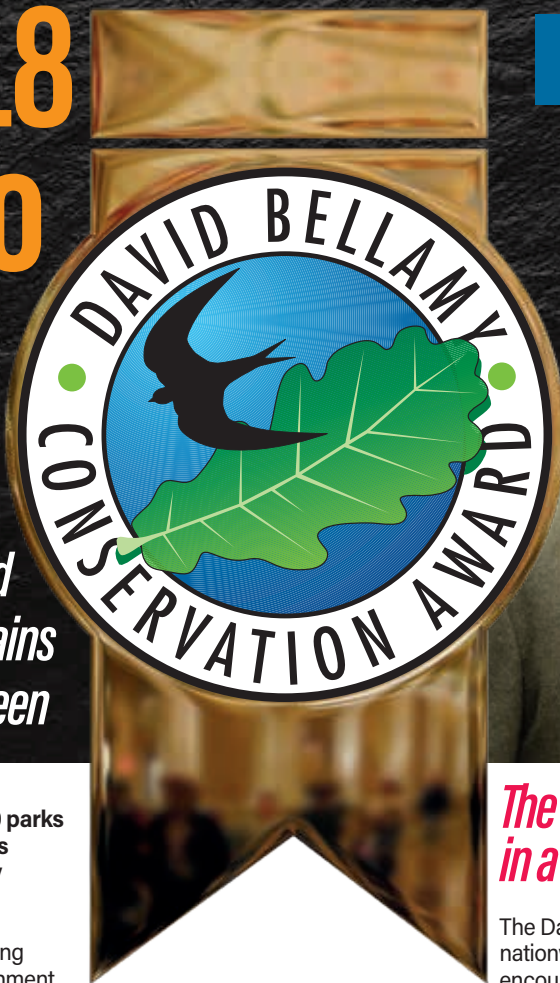
Environmental issues are as important as ever. Thanks to the Blue Planet 2 television programme, plastic waste is very much on everyone's mind and there is a real feeling that more and more people are trying to play their part, whether it is by changing what they eat, buy or do or making small, or not so small, changes to become that bit greener.

The David Bellamy Scheme is the perfect way for a park team to let customers know that they share their concerns. This message comes through loud and clear when talking to park owners and managers committed to the Scheme.

'Conservation is in our DNA,' said David Hall, Head of Leisure Strategy & Transformation at Northumbrian Water Group, which runs Kielder Waterside in the North East. *'Over recent years, the public's understanding of environmental conservation issues has increased dramatically. We know that the more discerning guests are looking for holidays that are not only enjoyable but that come with environmental credentials too. In fact, one of our recent staff appointments was to someone specifically looking to work for an employer with environment and conservation at their heart.'*

Care for the environment and business go hand in hand for many parks. In 2017, Kielder Waterside invested significantly in new energy-efficient lodges while also supporting important conservation work both on its land (including managing a nature garden and wildflower areas) and in surrounding woodland (where it has set up a world-class Osprey Watch facility in partnership with Forestry Commission England and the Northumberland Wildlife Trust).

This is, perhaps, one of the reasons that the David Bellamy Scheme is now over 20 years old – few industries other than the holiday and park homes sector can get such significant benefits from going green.



The Scheme in a nutshell



The David Bellamy Scheme is a nationwide initiative that aims to encourage and support parks in their

environmental work. It provides an assessment by a knowledgeable local environmentalist and lots of advice and recommendations. Participants can win either a Gold, Silver or Bronze Award which they can use to let people know of their commitment to the planet. Many park owners and managers use the Scheme to focus aspects of their work.

'We are situated in the midst of a number of nature reserves and taking part in the David Bellamy Conservation Award Scheme helps us maintain focus and plan our work to suit the natural environment around us,' said Sarah Lewis, Park Manager at Morben Isaf in Wales. *'Many of our holiday home owners and visiting tourists are enthusiastic birdwatchers and nature lovers. We are therefore keen to promote conservation in all aspects of our business and are enthusiastic to be able to raise awareness whenever possible.'*

'Participating in the Scheme means that we always evaluate ideas and plans to ensure that the ethos of conservation is applied at all times,' Sarah added. *'We have certainly seen rewards. The variety of wild and bird life seen on park is amazing and has in turn resulted in new business as more customers are attracted by it. Many comment on the ability to balance the quality of being a five-star holiday park whilst working in harmony with and enhancing the natural landscape around us. Our customers also appreciate our commitment and work with us to meet the standards and requirements set by the scheme. Staff, holiday home owners and visitors all contribute to making our park a repeat Gold Award winner, of which we are very proud.'*

Morben Isaf, like Kielder Waterside and many other parks in the Scheme, has developed partnerships with local conservation bodies. In Morben Isaf's case it works with the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust to help support its work on the Cors Dyfi Nature Reserve.





Birdwatching
at Kielder

Saving money and improving facilities

Wyre Vale, Acresfield and Merlewood Country Park in Lancashire have also benefitted from Scheme participation.

'Being part of the Award Scheme has had a huge impact upon the way we manage our parks and plan for the future,' said owner Michael Ward. 'The homeowners on our residential parks, Wyre Vale and Acresfield, and our holiday home owners on Merlewood Country Park have embraced the conservation initiatives which we have instigated over the years. Not only do the parks look magnificent but the abundance of wildlife both living on the parks and visiting us has increased substantially. The Scheme has motivated us to "push the boundaries" and to overcome challenges.'

Michael reports that it is not just the look of his parks that have changed for the better as a result of his green initiatives, so too has the cost of running them.

'We were determined when designing our new leisure club, Acresfield, that not only would we use natural and recycled products where possible, but that we would turn a normally high energy-using facility into an energy-efficient one by incorporating the very latest technologies. No mean feat but we achieved our goal. The building has an "A" rating.

'Both David and his team have provided us and continue to provide us with inspiration and invaluable guidance and support,' Michael added. 'As have the annual assessors who have visited us over the 18 years that we have been part of the Scheme. We are very proud to be part of this most worthwhile initiative. Other parks that are not yet involved should certainly consider it.' ▶

Acresfield Health Club
and Spa building





Wildflowers take centre stage in 2018

The key focus of the DBCAS is on wildlife. This is because creating and managing habitats is one of the most important things a park can do for the environment. With this in mind, the Scheme is asking all participants to give extra attention to five specific habitats over five years. In 2017, it focused on hedgerows. In 2018, parks are being asked to look at their wildflower areas. Participants will be asked to report on the extent of wildflower areas they have on their parks and to let their assessors know how they manage these areas, outlining their plans to plant more. They will then receive a wildflower habitat badge to match last year's hedgerow habitat badge. This badge is still available to be won by parks that did not participate in this aspect of the Scheme in 2017.

Participating parks will be sent advice on how to grow wildflowers and establish wildflower meadows. To help kick-start this work, we have packets of wildflower seeds available on a first come, first served basis (see box overleaf for details).

Wildflowers are incredibly important food sources for pollinating insects, such as bees and butterflies, which are, in turn, vital for the health of the wider countryside. Wildflower meadows also provide cover for many small mammals and other animals. Wildflowers are themselves rare and some endangered. They are especially beautiful and a vanishing part of the unique tapestry of the British countryside.

One idea for wildflower planting is the Ribbon of Poppies Memorial Project by a group called the Memorial Mob. Their plan was initially to create a carpet of crimson from Land's End to John o'Groats to remember all those killed or wounded in World War One. However, given the power of the internet, the project now stretches from the Orkney Islands in the North to the Falkland Islands in the South and to the West – Los Angeles.

According to the group, all that is needed to participate is a pocket of land and a packet of seeds. To follow the project and for details of how to grow poppies and potential seed sources search @RibbonofPoppies on Facebook and Twitter. According to the group there are still a whole host of areas across the UK that need their first pledges or more pledges to help create the planned ribbon effect. To be part of this global act of remembrance in 2018, register online¹.

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Hedge success points the way

The importance of focusing on habitat creation is shown by last year's success with hedges. In 2017, some 300 parks confirmed that between them they had an amazing 362 miles of wildlife-friendly hedging – further than the distance between London and Edinburgh as the crow flies. This represents an incredible wildlife resource and underlines the importance of parks for nature conservation. It will be exciting to see how many square miles of wildflowers we will find this year.

The impact of planting hedges can be seen at Holgates Silverdale near Morecambe Bay. This park received a Special Distinction Award for planting eight miles of new hedgerows in 2017. The work took nine months to complete, and brought in a raft of species including hawthorn, hazel, ash and oak, interwoven with climbers such as traveller's joy and honeysuckle.

Michael Holgate, the family-owned group's Managing Director, said that everyone was immensely proud of the Award – and that the news soon had a rippling effect: *'We found ourselves in the publicity spotlight both in the regional press and in a number of national publications, which was very pleasing,'* Michael explained. *'Our local newspaper described Holgates' staff as "hedgerow heroes", which raised a few smiles but nevertheless brought them the credit they deserved!'*

Media coverage of his parks' eight miles of hedgerow described how dormice, hedgehogs, red squirrels, butterflies and birds will all benefit from the project.

'It is surprising just how many regular customers also picked up on the fact that we had won an Award, with many offering their congratulations to our team members. I think the David Bellamy Conservation Award will always resonate well with people who visit parks because they enjoy getting closer to nature and the countryside. For that reason, we provide a lot of information about the type of initiatives we take, such as our Honey Bee Friendly Project and efforts to boost our red squirrel population. Quite often we are asked by guests about how they can play their part, and we're always pleased to provide advice on planting pollen-rich flowers in their gardens, for example.'



Hedges at Haw Wood Farm

Michael Holgate and local charity Westmorland Red Squirrels



Honey bee project buzzes from strength to strength

The Honey Bee Friendly Project that Michael Holgate mentions is another DBCAS initiative that is being continued in 2018. The scheme, which started in 2015, is a link-up with the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA). It aims to get as many BH&HPA member parks as possible working to conserve Britain's bees. To highlight the bee-friendly work that parks are doing, participants are given a Honey Bee Pledge to display. Those that are judged to have done enough are given a Honey Bee Friendly Park certificate.

Over 500 member parks took the Honey Bee Pledge last year and did lots of important work for bee conservation, planting the forage crops that these and other pollinators need, providing places for bees to nest and spreading the word about the importance of bee conservation.

This work is vital: these beautiful and fascinating creatures are an integral part of the British countryside but are under increasing pressure. ➤



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Spreading the word and reaping the benefits

The DBCAS encourages parks to work with their local communities. Moss Wood Caravan Park near Lancaster has been owned by the Wild family for over 40 years – and for the last 20 it has achieved the Gold David Bellamy Conservation Award. However, 2017 was extra special for Moss Wood when it was announced that the park had received a Special Distinction Award for its outreach work in the local community.

Its initiatives included a hugely successful nature discovery day last summer aimed at youngsters and grown-ups keen to learn more about rural Lancashire's abundant flora and fauna. Henry Wild says its annual Gold Award traditionally generates good local media coverage, and that, on this occasion, the Special Distinction Award provided an extra publicity boost.

'We are sending out a message about our business to people who live and work in the community, and that of course includes local politicians and councillors,' Henry added. 'Like many parks based in the countryside, we are largely screened from public view and the nature of our activity is not always obvious to the outside world.'

Moss Wood's well-attended activity day drew both local residents and park guests. The menu of activities included pond dipping in the park's wildlife lake, bird box and bug hotel building and a series of fun competitions for children. Guests were also able to explore a recently opened 1.5km nature discovery trail and a 3,000 square-foot wildflower wilderness attracting honey bees and butterflies.

'The Conservation Award helps throw a very positive light on the contribution we make to the environment and is also a chance for us to explain more about the park,' Henry added. 'Everyone realises the importance of helping to sustain the natural world, and the David Bellamy Scheme provides recognition of the very real contributions which parks make. This goes a long way to removing some of the mystique which can surround park enterprises and can be helpful when we are in discussion with local decision-makers. Perhaps these benefits, useful though they can be, are outweighed by the pride which the Award helps to instil among our owners and customers, and our staff as well.'

Open to all BH&HPA members

The DBCAS is open to any BH&HPA member park committed to supporting the environment, with almost every type of park currently represented amongst the Award winners.

The Scheme is very keen to welcome parks beginning to work towards sustainability, with assessors eager to help them improve their environmental performance. Over the years, the Scheme has seen a number of parks which have started at the Bronze entry level, moved up through Silver, and finally attained a Gold Award.

To join, email enquiries@bhpha.org.uk and information and joining forms will then be provided. For any questions, please email Rufus Bellamy at bellamycom1@aol.com. ■



Red squirrel feeding stations at Skelwith Fold

Free wildflower seeds available for bee-pledge parks

We are delighted to announce that, thanks to the generous support of the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) and the cosmetic company Burt's Bees, we are able to offer free wildflower seed packs to parks that are taking part in the David Bellamy Award Scheme's Honey Bee Pledge.

Successful parks will receive 100g of seed mix that contains 26 varieties of native wildflowers specifically chosen to help honey bees and butterflies. To request the seeds email enquiries@bhpha.org.uk providing name, park name and delivery address.

There is only one thing that parks are then asked to do: provide photos of the wildflower area created using the seeds showing the colourful results. The photos should feature the Burt's Bees 'I'm planting a pollinator patch' poster which will be supplied via email. The photos should be sent to Rufus Bellamy at beefriendlyparks@aol.com.

The photos will be used by the BBKA on a mapping collage and will feature on the BBKA website, Facebook page and newsletter as part of a write-up of the campaign. This offers a great opportunity to publicise parks to BBKA members, so it would be a good idea to include a park sign in photos!



Further information

¹ Registration for the global act of remembrance in 2018:
<https://tinyurl.com/yb2mvmn8>