



Warm welcome at special open afternoon for reserve's new education and visitor centre

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An exciting new education and visitor centre opens its doors to the public for the first time for a special Open Afternoon from 2 to 6pm on Thursday 27 September at the Hawk and Owl Trust's Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve near Fakenham, North Norfolk. Admission is free and refreshments will be available.

The Open Afternoon will give visitors their first chance to see inside the centre with its displays introducing them to the birds of prey and other wildlife of Sculthorpe Moor, as well as its fascinating history. There are also CCTV links to wildlife activity around the reserve.

On show as well will be works of art inspired by the reserve, from a competition for under 14s and adults that the Trust organised to celebrate the opening. The exhibition will continue until the end of October.

The reserve is home to an increasing variety of species, from barn owls, harriers, willow tits, water voles and otters to butterflies and dragonflies and scarce plants such as the marsh fern.

Visitors may be able to spot some of these as they explore the reserve, perhaps as they walk along the new stretch of boardwalk to the reserve's recently-completed elevated bird hide, which overlooks the reed bed.

Completion of the centre marks the latest stage of a £1 million development of the reserve, which is improving access and restoring the variety of habitats. This second phase of the reserve's development is largely financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Regional Development Fund through the EU Objective 2 Programme but is also backed by other support - financial and in kind - from charitable trusts, organisations and individuals, including many volunteers.

"We hope to welcome lots of people to Sculthorpe Moor - both for the open afternoon and on normal visiting days," said Leanne Thomas, education and marketing manager for the Hawk and Owl Trust, Britain's leading national charity dedicated to protecting wild birds of prey and their habitats.

"We're very proud of our new wooden building, which has many eco-friendly elements such as sheep's wool and shredded newspaper as insulation and guttering formed from re-cycled aluminium. As part of the next stage of our work we are putting up a wind turbine which will provide sustainable energy."

The Trust's Sculthorpe Moor reserve is part of the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated by the European Union because of its international ecological importance. Some of the land is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Over the past six years the Trust, working with the local community, has turned this rare remnant of nationally important riverside fen into a haven for a whole range of wildlife.

The centre is being officially opened the day before the Open Afternoon by HRH The Princess Royal. That occasion is for invited guests only and the reserve will be closed to the public that day.

- Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve lies just off the A148 (Cromer to King's Lynn), one mile west of Fakenham. It is open daily (except Monday). The winter opening times are 8am to 4pm (October to March). The reserve stays open longer in summer. Admission is free, although the Trust, as a registered charity, welcomes donations towards its work.
 - For information about educational visits, courses or conferences, contact Leanne Thomas on 0771 2241920.
- ENDS -

Press enquiries only: Barbara Hall, 020 8858 4154 or Leanne Thomas, 0771 2241920.

Press invitations to the royal opening of the centre will be issued w/c 17 September.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Hawk and Owl Trust

Founded in 1969 to help save the peregrine, the Hawk and Owl Trust is a national charity which now works for the conservation and appreciation of all wild birds of prey and their habitats - both in its growing number of nature reserves and in partnership with others. Working with other organisations, farmers, foresters and landowners, the Trust researches, restores and manages nesting, roosting and feeding habitats and encourages greater understanding and appreciation of these very special birds. www.hawkandowl.org

2. Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve, near Fakenham

The reserve is a rare remnant of old riverside fen in the Upper Wensum Valley, rescued by the Hawk and Owl Trust and the local community. The Trust leases the core area of the reserve from a parish charity, which holds the land in perpetuity. The land, some of which is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), consists of reed bed, valley fen, alder carr and woodland with a rich biodiversity of plants and animals. It is part of the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated because of its international ecological importance, and is the only place in the Wensum Valley where sedge occurs, now a priority habitat for conservation in Europe.

The Trust is developing the reserve to benefit not only the birds of prey such as harrier and barn owls that frequent the site, but also the ecosystem that supports these top predators and the traditional working practices that give life to that ecosystem.

www.sculthorpemoor.org

3. The Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund enables communities to celebrate, look after and learn more about our diverse heritage. From our great museums and historic buildings to local parks and countryside or recording and celebrating traditions, customs and history, HLF grants open up our nation's heritage for everyone to enjoy. We have awarded grants totalling £3.6 billion to more than 18,800 projects, including over £244 million to more than 2,500 projects in the East of England alone.

4. European Union Object 2 Programme 2000-2006

This programme is designed to support economic regeneration activity in designated areas through funding from the European Structural Funds. For more information see the Government Office Website: www.goeast.gov.uk/

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