

Econet Conservation Group

Reading, Berkshire

Annual Report 2008

Conservation of the natural environment - for the wildlife and the community

CROW at Albert Road Day Centre, Caversham



In May CROW, Econet's mid week group, visited the old people's day centre in Albert Road, Caversham to clear overgrown shrubs thereby opening up the patio, allowing more light into the lounge and improving the view. Access to the lawn was also improved by levelling the path. For the task they were joined by volunteers from the local offices of Kensington Mortgages.



This was just one of the wide variety of tasks CROW undertook in and around Reading during the last year. Econet also ran regular weekend tasks throughout the year at Clayfield Copse, Mapledurham Playing Fields, Mclloy Park and Waterloo Meadows on behalf of the *Friends of* groups.

Clayfield Copse - An Eventful Year

In addition to the well attended tasks held on the first Sunday of each month, a number of events have been organised at Clayfield Copse to promote an interest in both the site and wildlife in general.

Last autumn's Fungus Foray was followed by Bluebell and Dawn Chorus walks in spring and

a Herbal Plant walk in the summer. In June a story telling event, Dragon Tales, was held. Participation in all these events was excellent except for the Herbal Plant walk which sadly fell victim to this summer's weather.

It is hoped to repeat all these walks in the coming year. Other possible themes being considered include butterflies and tree identification.

Supported by Reading Borough Council

CROW (Conserve Reading on Wednesdays)

CROW had another successful year with a task almost every week and an average turnout of more than 5 volunteers.



Within the Borough bird boxes provided by RBC, were installed at Caversham Court and Forbury Gardens. At Caversham Court help was also provided to create a loggery (a home for stage beetle larvae), bug hotel and bumblebee bank, as well as to lay a hedge. (The latter has unfortunately been damaged recently by intruders but CROW intends to return in the autumn to make good the damage.)

In addition to the annual willow harvest, extra tasks were undertaken at Kings Meadow to insure all the willow beds were cleared to improve the public's perception of the site's management.

The group continued its long standing relationship with Brookfields, the special needs school in Tilehurst, helping to maintain the wildlife area including a visit during the school's Eco week at the start of July when they assisted students building an bug hotel. During the summer months, the group has also been working at Englefield Market Garden which is run by the Thames and Chiltern Trust (TACT) to provide training in horticulture for people with learning difficulties.

Hedge laying, which drew a positive response from local residents, was among the tasks undertaken at Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve; while in West Berkshire CROW's activities included coppicing and scrub clearance at sites such as Padworth and Wokefield Commons.

In recent months employees from Kensington Mortgages have joined CROW for a number of tasks. Econet hopes to provide more conservation volunteering opportunities for employees and others through its contacts with organisations such as Connect Reading and GRAFT.



The bug hotel constructed by CROW at Caversham Court provides a home for small mammals and lizards as well as invertebrates. It is also a novel use for discarded pallets.

'Friends of' Groups

Econet has continued to run regular monthly tasks on behalf of the 'Friends of' groups at the following venues:

Clayfield Copse, Caversham - 1st Sunday of the month
Mapledurham Playing Fields - 3rd Saturday of the month (September to April)
Mcllroy Park, Tilehurst - 4th Sunday of the month (except August and December)
Waterloo Meadows - various days throughout the year

Publicity

Our website, www.econetreading.org.uk, is now our main link the outside world providing information about the Group and its activities. The website and the associated email, info@econetreading.org.uk, have generated a steady stream of enquiries about the Group.

The Group is registered with the Reading Volunteers Centre (RVA) and the four sites where regular tasks are held Clayfield Copse, Mapledurham Playing Fields, Mcllroy Park and Waterloo Meadows appear on the BBC's Breathing Places website.

The idea for a Group T-shirt or tabard has been considered and rejected but we are

continuing to investigate having a banner which could be displayed at tasks.

A business card for the Group is another idea which remains to be explored.



Accounts

Financial Year ending March 2008

During this period the Group organised over 80 conservation tasks.

For the first time in recent years there was a considerable investment in tools, as a result the end of year bank balance had fallen by almost £900 to £2,578 although £245 was owed to the Group for task charges. Total expenditure on tools was £769.

The grant of £500 received from Reading Borough Council was used to provide insurance, including Public Liability. Tools insurance was increased to cover those stored at Prospect Park.

Task charges made by CROW exceeded task expenses by £115. Included in these expenses was the cost of providing regular CROW volunteers with their own hard hats, a perk intended to improve safety awareness.

A change to the bank account result in an almost threefold increase in the interest received.

A summary of the accounts can be found on the final page of this report.

The current year

The level of investment in tools seen last year is unlikely to be repeated.

We have been awarded a grant of £500 by Reading Borough Council which should cover our insurance costs. However bank interest payments will fall following account changes made by our bankers (Alliance and Leicester).

As a result of the steep increase in fuel prices, payments made to CROW volunteers for the use their cars to transport tools and other volunteers have been increased. This will be offset by an increase in task charges. (It should be noted CROW only makes a charge for the minority of its tasks, about 25%).

ECONET Accounts Summary 2007/2008

(Unaudited)

1st April 2007 to 31st March 2008**Income**

	2007/2008		2006/2007	
Grants		£500.00		£500.00
Task Charges		£260.00		£450.00
Interest		£142.25		£52.49
Total		£902.25		£1,002.49

Expenditure

	2007/2008		2006/2007	
Insurance				
Public Liability/Personal Accident	£309.87		£309.87	
Tools	<u>£155.00</u>	£464.87	<u>£55.00</u>	£364.87
Affiliation Fees		£35.00		£35.00
Tools				
Purchases	£707.81		£53.96	
Running Costs/Maintenance	<u>£61.84</u>	£769.65	<u>£0.00</u>	£53.96
Manuals		£9.95		£0.00
Task Costs				
Refreshments	£85.70		£61.17	
Travel Costs	£229.50		£258.50	
Perks	<u>£73.84</u>	£389.04	<u>£0.00</u>	£319.67
Publicity				
Leaflets	£0.00		£1.00	
Website	<u>£37.60</u>	£37.60	<u>£0.00</u>	£1.00
Overheads				
Administration	<u>£86.23</u>	£86.23	<u>£9.34</u>	£9.34
Total		£1,792.34		£783.84

Financial Statement

	2007/2008		2006/2007	
Bank Balances, etc. Brought Forward		£3,468.98		£3,250.33
Income & Expenditure				
Income	£902.25		£1,002.49	
Less Expenditure	<u>£1792.34</u>	(£890.09)	<u>£783.84</u>	£218.65
Carried forward		<u>£2,578.89</u>		<u>£3,468.98</u>
Liabilities		<u>£0.00</u>		<u>£0.00</u>
Outstanding Income				
Task Charges		£245.00		£0.00