



Community Heritage Initiative

Year 3 Project Report

February 2006 - January 2007



Community Heritage Initiative Leicestershire County Council

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Introduction

The Community Heritage Initiative (CHI) was launched in February 2004, with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Rutland County Council. The project is based within Leicestershire County Council (LCC)'s Environment and Heritage Service, part of the Historic and Natural Environment Team. It works closely with many other LCC sections, including Library Services (through the Breathing Places campaign), country parks and museum collections, as well as partnerships with other conservation and wildlife groups.

Making local connections to heritage on the doorstep is a key element, with CHI assisting local recording and local heritage action, through support of local Heritage Wardens and community heritage and conservation groups. Advice is given on projects and funding, and support is given to events such as an annual heritage conference, one of the only events in the two counties that bring such groups together. The April 2006 event covered landscape paintings, oral history recording, "faith and nature" and "food for free from the countryside", highlighting the links between the countryside and our cultural heritage. CHI encourages individuals and communities to survey, document and archive records, and safeguard local heritage features that have been identified as important.



In 2006 the project worked closely with the Women's Institute who were awarded over £50,000 from various funders to develop a project to record and creatively celebrate the wild flowers of Leicestershire and Rutland. The project also advised the Leicestershire Entomological Society on a proposal to develop local Lepidoptera specimen collections.

Feedback and consultation is vital to developing the future of recording and conservation in the county. In January 2007 CHI facilitated bringing together 19 people, from 16 natural history societies, to talk about the future of biological recording, their own societies, and the work of the Records Centre. The resulting report will be a vital tool in informing future business plans for LCC. It will help guide future funding bids and actions. Among those the team are currently helping to develop are groups such as the Leicestershire Entomological Society (LES) .



CHI has been developing initiatives that celebrate the "natural champions of Leicestershire and Rutland". In 2006 this concept was begun with the "Focus on... Heritage Wardens" display boards. These feature individual wardens, detailing and celebrating their work.



This idea was further developed with the creation of a display that focuses on local naturalists of all ages, leading by example and telling their stories of natural history studies.

In 2007 the concept will continue with over 20 oral histories being recorded from local people who study and work within the natural environment of the counties.

Networking

CHI plays a central role in the green and heritage networks of the two counties, acting as a vital signpost to the public and community groups alike.



As the project has progressed, opportunities to become involved in the wider arena, and provide benefits beyond its own key outputs, have become clear. These are often developed through positive partnerships working with other agencies and groups, and have covered new themes or specialist areas.

Within Leicestershire and Rutland, the Nature Conservation Forum has been running for over a decade. The CHI team undertook a review of this forum, developing new ideas based on comments from participants. With more networking opportunities, variation in length of presentations, use of the LCC website and opportunities to display, the sustainability of this vital bi-annual meeting will be ensured. Feedback included:

"Impressed with the initiative, interest and devotion of the Park Rangers"

"Still impressed by the work of the County Council and especially the impact of the CHI"

There were also requests for dedicated events on natural history recording, and training in MapMate by a national expert was organised for 12 key county recorders in February 2006.

CHI has helped plan and promote a new annual recording conference, working with colleagues from within the Leicestershire Environmental Records Centre, the first of which will take place in March 2007.

A comprehensive programme of literature, information, support, training and community events helps raise awareness of local wildlife, conservation and heritage issues. Much of the training is provided by local experts, who share their own experiences. In 2006 the project attracted praise from national experts, and offers of help from many new speakers. This has allowed future plans to include linked courses and new creative recording programmes.



CHI aims to attract new people by highlighting the importance and relevance of our natural heritage to our daily lives, not just through the science of natural history, but also by creative and informal recording. Successful digital photography courses and wider publicity profiles in the past year have attracted new people to submit wildlife records. These are then displayed on the website photo gallery or leicestershirevillages.com.

Nearly 750 people have requested survey packs, becoming potential nature detectives in areas they visit. CHI also supports the many active naturalist volunteers, individuals, or members of natural history groups. This has involved 1:1 meetings to help groups achieve their goals and develop in the future.

Between February 2006 and 2007 the team has issued over 80 media releases, answered over 2300 enquiries, and attended talks and events with additional audiences of just under 2700. CHI is often first point of contact for local press enquiries and is used as a model project by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Young people

CHI works with young people aged 7-20 years. This year has seen new projects focused around wildlife recording.

Loughborough Brownies

Following last year's successful session, learning about badgers with Leicestershire Badger Group, the Brownies were introduced to natural history recording using colour, sound, quadrats and poetry.



A session spent looking for different coloured natural history objects, and listening to natural sounds, made the group aware of the wealth of natural history that could be discovered in a small urban space.

Over a weekend in May, 47 Brownies joined CHI for quadrat making, natural history recording and poetry sessions. Wildlife in the woodland and grassland areas around the camp was recorded by the Brownies, who wrote about or drew what they saw. Taking the natural world as their inspiration, the Brownies also worked on poems in conjunction with a local poet.



"Finding a worm and a frog hopper was great."

"Just taking one look at something does not mean there is nothing there."

A new mosses collection box is being used by local libraries to promote natural history to new audiences.



Display cases showing bumblebee collections and pond insects will also be available in the coming year.



The collections are used in CHI's training events, enabling people to practice their identification skills before going out in the field.

Animal and plant structures can also be highlighted using specimens, providing a valuable aid to learning.

The promotion of the collections in this way has led to an increase in identification enquiries from the public, and offers of donations of specimens to the centre.



Two "behind the scenes" sessions were run, enabling members of the public to visit the collections at the Collections Resources Centre.

Collections

Natural history collections are a unique way of illustrating the diversity of the natural world, and are an excellent education and training resource.

Over the last year CHI has promoted and supported work on the collections at the Collections Resources Centre for use by members of the public, young people, and natural history groups.



This has included the development of a bat travelling display case linked to a bat project promoting the Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group.

The case has toured county libraries and been one of the most successful to date.

A travelling display case featuring wild flowers is currently being prepared for touring local venues in the coming year.

A bone collection was purchased, with the help of CHI, which includes skeletons of mammals and birds. This collection was used for a bone themed Wildlife Watch event run by CHI for children aged 6-14 years.



Display cases featuring pond creatures and beetles enthralled young people in sessions which explored bugs and pond life. The pond case helped local youngsters learn about the wildlife that they would be able to find in their local village pond.

Pond Activities at South Luffenham

An initial approach by the Youth Co-ordinator at South Luffenham Parish Council led to a pond restoration and recording project in the village. CHI worked with over 50% of young people, aged between 11-18, on a number of activities which centred around bringing the local village pond back to life. Young people were actively involved in publicising and contributing to a village meeting which was held to determine the future of the pond. A village action day followed, with everyone working on clearing the areas around the pond. CHI ran some natural history



recording sessions with the young people involving photography, an information and quiz evening, and a craft activity. Display panels were also made, telling the history of the pond up to the present day. The group have been successful in securing funding for future

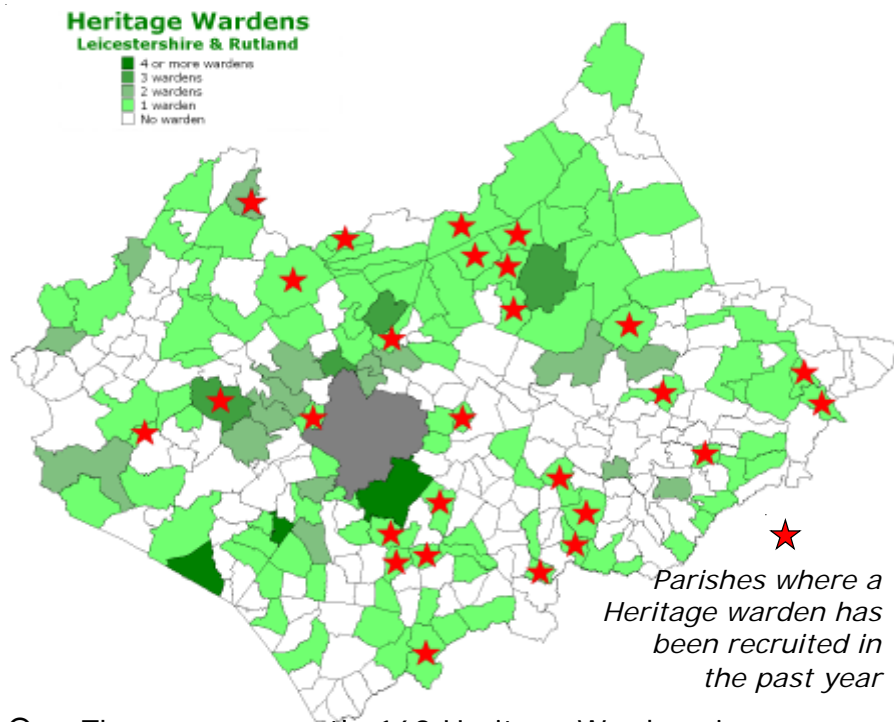
work and management of the pond to ensure its continued conservation.

"I really enjoyed the sessions – it was something different."

"It was great clearing the area and seeing the water for the first time."

"I learnt the difference between a grass snake and an adder."

Heritage Wardens



- ⊙ There are currently 162 Heritage Wardens in Leicestershire and Rutland
- ⊙ 126 parishes have one or more Heritage Wardens

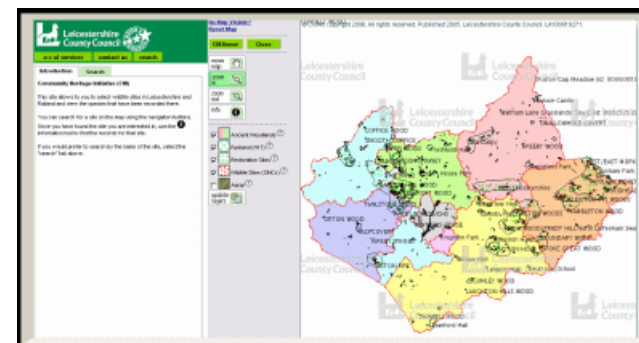
Heritage Warden achievements this year have included:

- ⊙ Publication of a book on the history of Melton Mowbray
- ⊙ A Heritage Open Day in Rothley, in September 2006, attracting over 800 people
- ⊙ Barrow-upon-Soar awarded a grant for £18,000 for projects including a village tree trail
- ⊙ Rothley Heritage Warden awarded an MBE for her achievements



Staunton Harold wardens at the launch of their parish guide leaflet

In early January the pilot record portal was published on the CHI website to allow users to test it. Early feedback suggests that users think it will provide a useful tool, but are looking forward to more relevant data being included.



Users can select a wildlife site in Leicestershire & Rutland, either by name or by searching on a map. They can then do a search for all records held on the National

Biodiversity Network Gateway for that site. By selecting the species they are interested in they can find out more about it via Wikipedia. It is hoped to also add information about the wildlife sites.

Other progress has been the setting up of a Heritage Wardens' forum on the Leicestershire Community Forums website, after wardens requested a place to exchange ideas and ask for advice.

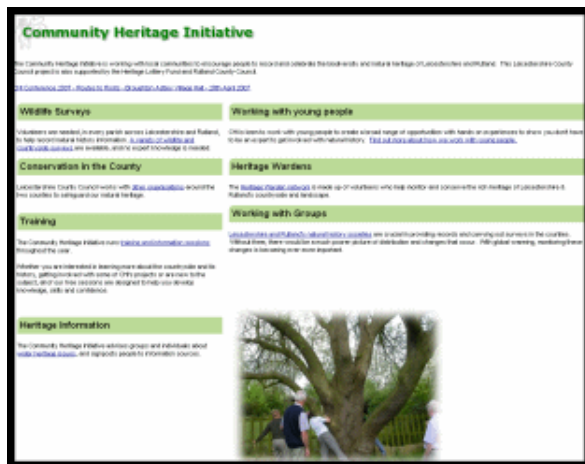


www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife

- Home page received 4657 visits in 2006
- The Hop, Skip and Jump hare and rabbit survey information page also proved popular, with 2350 visits
- A gallery of photos sent in to the CHI attracted 1977 visitors
- Approximately 200% increase in visitors to the website compared to the previous year

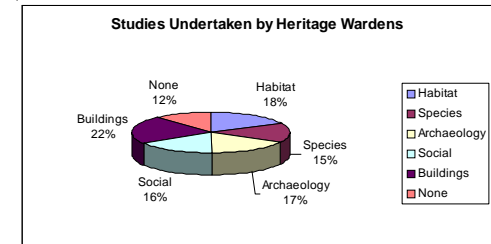


In November 2006 the CHI website was redesigned to make information more accessible and to include all the material that the project has now produced. Previous user statistics showed that online forms for submitting records are more popular than downloading forms, so the development plan included online versions of all CHI surveys. An area for Heritage Wardens is also in development.



In 2006 CHI sent out a questionnaire to all wardens to identify areas for support and issues which may affect recruitment and retention of wardens. 118 wardens responded.

- 56% have undertaken CHI wildlife and countryside surveys.
- 65% of the 110 respondents indicated time was the major constraint on activity
- 24% are active in fundraising for their parish
- 27% are involved with their parish web sites
- 57% who have attended training courses had used new skills



"More support for cultural heritage work"

Action points

- Help wardens find more people to work on projects
- Spread training venues more widely around the two counties
- Help wardens to share their skills
- Publicise equipment available for loan from the CHI

"Need help motivating others"



A networking event in Melton in October brought together 10 wardens from Melton district to discuss their projects and share ideas, as well as giving potential new wardens a chance to see what the network was about. Similar events are planned for 2007 in other districts.

Records

In 2006 CHI received almost 10,000 species records - including over 5000 butterfly records - and 1500 miscellaneous records, including hummingbird hawk moths, great crested newts, and a variety of birds and plants. Many of these records were supported by photographs which were displayed on the website.



Spawn Spot Survey

250% increase in records

Records received	2005	2006
Frogs	757	2734
Frog spawn	628	2229
Toads	118	343
Toad spawn	40	156

Exchange of data

Records were exchanged with the UK Ladybird Survey and an arrangement was made with Leicestershire and Rutland



Ornithological Society to receive their records monthly. Other enquiries from recorders included identification of snakes, newts and moths which were referred to county recorders or in-house experts.



Highlights

In February 2006, at the Collection Resources Centre, Barrow, and Beacon Hill Country Park, Anthony Fletcher led two sessions on identifying trees in winter.



"It's inspired me to get tree recording."

"It was great having the two sessions and being able to practice outdoors".

In July 2006 Ian Merrill, of Leics & Rutland Dragonfly Society, led a dragonfly hunt at Nature Alive.



"The session was well led with lots of information."

In October 2006 a group of people, with local experts, learnt about how to lead a guided walk.

"I enjoyed looking for the larvae cases and finding out about the life cycle of these fascinating creatures."

"It has helped me with ideas for a walk in our parish."

In January 2007, Ann Todd from the Civic Trust led a session on Running a Heritage Open Day with volunteers who had run a local event in Rothley.

"It was good to have such an enthusiastic and encouraging team giving the training."



The CHI programme in 2007 will cover topics such as plant galls, wild flower ID, landscape history and training on oral history recording.

Training

The CHI natural history and heritage information sessions, run free of charge for the public, are well established and provide people with the skills and information needed to help record and celebrate our natural history and heritage.

Between February 2006 and January 2007, CHI ran 37 information sessions involving 488 people. Topics included:

Lectures

- Amphibians
- Woodland History & Wildlife
- Leicestershire Countryside
- Birds of Leicestershire
- Wildlife Law
- Wildlife Sites
- Listing Buildings
- Flower Folklore
- History of Mothing
- Behind the Scenes –
- Natural History Collections

Broadening Knowledge

- Listing Buildings
- How to Lead a Guided Walk
- So you want to be a
- Heritage
- Warden
- Presentation
- Skills
- Running a
- Heritage
- Open Day



Natural History Skills



- Tree Identification (Winter & Summer)
- MapMate software
- Recording Woodland History & Wildlife
- Neighbourhood Bats
- Pond Dipping
- Dragonfly

- Identification
- Grassland Plant Identification
- How to Record Wildlife
- Ageing Trees

Group Development

- Finding Funds
- Developing Your Group
- Selling Your Story

County records

2006 saw first records for Leicestershire & Rutland of the harlequin ladybird, *harmonia axyridis*, an invasive species which arrived in Britain in 2004. First recorded by volunteer Glenys Panter on 7th July in Ketton Churchyard, Rutland, and 10 days later in Charnwood by Graham Finch. Further records were received over the year from various parts of the county, including one at Holly Hayes in January 2007. Records were passed to the national harlequin ladybird recording scheme, which also assisted in providing photographs for media articles.



An unexpected first for the counties was the sighting of an amazonian freshwater jellyfish, *craspedacusta sowerbii*, at Stanigal Water in North West Leicestershire. It was spotted by a local man, Michael Grey, while walking his dog. He took a photograph and had it identified by a national expert, who passed the record on. The novelty of this record led to a large amount of press coverage and the opportunity to publicise the importance of recording wildlife and

submitting records to the centre. The story appeared in the national press and on local television.

Working with groups

CHI continued its work in supporting natural history societies and their work, with the development of the Village Bat Project with Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group.

Four village bat training sessions, involving 43 people, were run across the area, offering not only the opportunity to learn about bats, but also the skills to enable participants to get involved in bat surveys in their parishes.



By increasing the numbers of people involved in bat surveying, the Bat Group will be able to collect wider data on bat populations, their distribution and status across Leicestershire and Rutland.

As part of the bat project, CHI developed a bat travelling display case: "Bats – Fact or Fiction", which aimed to dispel the myths surrounding bats. This toured libraries around Leicestershire and the well known tourist venue, Oakham Castle in Rutland. Due to its popularity, the tour dates for the display case were extended to include more venues.



Work with the group has also included the production of a new leaflet and website, which will help the group promote its activities to the general public.

Leicestershire and Rutland WI launched a wildflower survey for 2007. CHI helped develop the survey, which is focusing on 12 common species that are used to tell us about the condition of wildlife habitats in the counties. The records produced will help monitor local biodiversity and the countryside. They will be added to the records at Holly Hayes, as well as informing conservation strategies, such as local Biodiversity Habitat Action Plans.



Five training sessions were run around the counties for 120 WI members, with CHI helping to deliver the survey skills training. WI members are being encouraged to take a creative approach to their recording, and CHI helped set up a series of digital photography sessions.



A "Nature Book" pack was also produced which included maps and survey forms.

The survey is not just open to W.I members but other community groups and schools. Heritage Wardens - part of CHI's volunteer network - are also involved in the project, supporting local WI's in their parishes.

The survey results will be part of a major display in 2008, including competitions on a wild flower theme. Results will also be digitised and available on the web.

Next year CHI will be working with Leicestershire and Rutland Fungi Study Group, Loughborough Natural History Society and the Leicestershire Badger Group.