



Community Heritage Initiative

Year 2 Project Report

February 2005 - February 2006

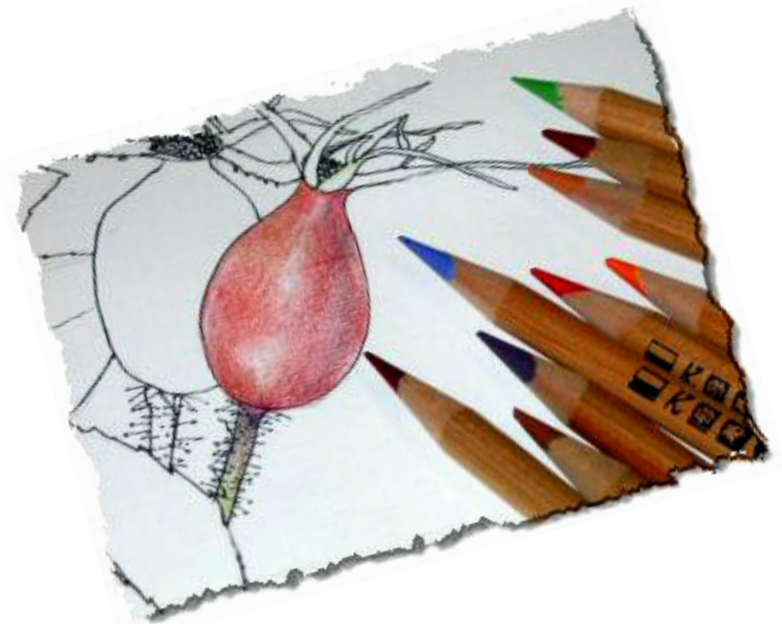
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Introduction

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's Environment and Heritage Service, working within the Historic and Natural Environment Team.

CHI promotes heritage study, documentation and celebration, focussing on themes of natural, geological, built, archaeological and social heritage within the context of countryside and landscape.



CHI encourages communities to record, document and archive records and then work to safeguard local heritage features that have been identified as locally important. This is through a comprehensive programme of literature, information, support, training and community events. In June 2005, this included the Open Day at the Environment and Heritage Resources Centre, which attracted 700 visitors.



The project makes the important link between environmental information, museum collections of specimens and objects, and local communities, making access easier and allowing connections to be made to many subjects.



In October 2005, a local expert helped people take their first steps in botanical illustration, an enjoyable and creative way of recording natural history.

"Excellent teacher"



In January 2006, landscape historian Tony Squires gave a series of popular talks on boundaries in the landscape.

Feedback from people attending the sessions was very positive and reviews written about sessions are published on the CHI website.

"It was a great afternoon"

"An excellent taster session"



Highlights

In March 2005, volunteers learned new survey techniques at Burbage Common.

"Dead good"

"Tutor was excellent"

"An informative day in good location"



"It was an excellent session with clear information"

In May 2005, national moth expert and author Dr Paul Waring led a Caterpillar Hunt at Beacon Hill Country Park.



"Wonderful to attract a national authority to lead a course"



In September 2005, the small mammals of the Holly Hayes garden were studied as people learnt how to use live traps and identify mice, voles and shrews.



"I left feeling fully equipped to carry out my own investigations at home. Many thanks for providing"

CHI aims to attract new people to celebrating our countryside and natural heritage, by highlighting the importance and relevance to our daily lives. In the past year, CHI has looked at how people can record the environment creatively and has developed a new pack entitled "Recording Naturally".



The project pilots new approaches and works to reach new audiences, such as young people who are our potential heritage guardians of the future.

CHI also supports the many naturalist volunteers who are active in Leicestershire and Rutland through natural history groups, or as individual volunteers. This is through promotion of their activities and development of new projects to assist their vital work. Over 80% of the records held at the Holly Hayes Environment and Heritage Resources Centre come from such local experts and CHI sees their input to the conservation of the two counties' heritage as vital.

Links to museums study collections and access to experts in the heritage field ensure that the project has a sustainable and credible support system to maximise potential for participants. At the same time these links enable the project to achieve community understanding and



frameworks for active involvement. The team therefore aims to offer the most complete and comprehensive forum possible to empower all members of the community to discover the natural wonders of the two counties.

Between February 2005 and 2006, the CHI team answered over 1,400 enquiries from the general public, with topics ranging from specific natural history enquiries, through to general heritage advice. The project has become an important signpost to heritage issues in the area and is often the focus for national studies for the Heritage Lottery Fund, or for providing advice to other authorities aiming to develop similar programmes. The team also attended events and talks for over 2,000 more people.



The team has supported 12 volunteers at Holly Hayes. They have assisted with admin duties, proof reading, database building, developing educational activities and running events.

The team issued 60 media releases with extensive coverage in all county papers. In addition the project has developed a strong profile in community publications such as The Forest, as well as achieving national coverage in conservation publications,



CHI runs a free training programme covering a range of topics to provide communities with information they need to contribute to the recording, protection and celebration of their local heritage.



Between February 2005 and January 2006, CHI ran 36 information sessions, involving 533 people.

Topics included:

Natural history skills

- MapMate software
- Soldier beetles & ladybirds
- Wildflowers
- Surveying for newts
- Butterfly identification
- Using historical records
- Caterpillar survey
- Small mammal survey
- Bird watching
- Collecting natural history

Broadening knowledge

- Botanical illustration
- Digital photography
- Behind scenes at Holly Hayes
- Boundaries in the landscape
- Historic parks and gardens
- The planning system
- Map interpretation

Lectures

- History and wildlife
- Fish
- Moths of Leicestershire
- British reptiles
- Wildflowers
- Phenology and climate change
- Castles of Leicestershire
- Historic parks and gardens
- Collecting natural history

Group development

- Health and safety



Website

www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife

The objectives of the CHI website are:
To promote the work of the records centre
To improve ease of access to information
To encourage new recorders
To engage children and young people
To raise awareness and use of natural history collections

Year 2 of CHI has seen the website continue to develop, and an increase in requests from across the world for our publications. The concept of this being a community resource has been embraced with regular contributions of wildlife photographs coming from the public for the new community records page.

People who attend training sessions now regularly write reviews for the site, and surveyors use the site to download forms.



Forthcoming sections will include a dedicated area for heritage wardens and development of the CHI survey forms so that records can be submitted over the internet as well.

2005-2006 has seen CHI leading on work for Leicestershire County Council, working with the National Biodiversity Network on developing a site that collates and provides easy access to wildlife site records for the two counties. This is pilot work, leading the way for other local authorities who might wish to make wildlife records accessible via the web. The site is currently being trialled and it is hoped will be linked to CHI pages in future months.

such as British Wildlife, which carried a review of one of our training sessions.

The team has also taken on the role of writing regular "green columns" for the Leicester Mercury, undertaken radio interviews, and in November 2005, worked with BBC TV's East Midlands Today to promote Season Watch, a project looking at monitoring climatic change through natural history occurrences. Spawn Spot was also featured on television in spring 2005.



CHI's work on promoting nature conservation issues has led to 670 people signing up for natural history survey packs, becoming potential nature detectives in areas they visit.



Developing Conservation Guardians of the Future

CHI runs projects with groups of young people aged 7 to 20 years to identify ways of engaging young people in wildlife recording.

"I really will miss coming here I enjoyed making quadrats"



Wild About...

The Wild About Action Pack was launched in March 2005 to help junior naturalists and families investigate and record the wildlife around them. Over 120 packs have been sent out, reaching over 200 young people, and the website

www.wildabout.org.uk

has helped many more people access it, including Heritage Wardens and community groups looking to engage groups of young people. 150 young people took part in Wild About events such as 'Glorious Grasslands' at the 2005 Open Day. Monthly press releases encourage even more young people to get involved.



"It was fantastic becoming a nature detective"

Ashby play scheme

The Wild About Action Pack led to a request for a series of workshops to be run at a summer play scheme in Ashby de la Zouch in July 2005. 110 young people took part in four nature detective workshops, making and using quadrats, starting a nature diary, searching for insects and talking about mammals.



"Thank you, I have learnt a lot from being in the nature detective workshop."

A smaller number of records were received for the pond and hedgerow surveys.



The commonest hedgerow species found were ash, blackthorn, dog rose, elder and hawthorn. The longest hedge recorded was 390 metres, the widest 4.5m and the tallest over 6 metres.

Field ponds were most frequently recorded surrounded by arable land, hedgerows and/or ditches.

Ponds are a rapidly disappearing habitat and this was shown by the loss of three ponds in Rothley.

Many ponds also showed possible signs of becoming silted up, which may mean they will no longer remain a pond habitat unless they are effectively managed.



CHI surveys provide a wealth of information about the natural world and it will be interesting to see what the results of our surveys in 2006 bring.

Protecting/conserving habitats



Ponds, old hedgerows and ancient trees are all part of our natural heritage and provide valuable wildlife habitats. CHI's surveys tell us where these habitats can be found in Leicestershire and Rutland. This

information can then be used to ensure that they are conserved for the future, with records being fed into the local Biodiversity Action Plans for these habitats.

- Over 200 records were sent in for the ancient tree survey.
- This included the discovery of a 720 year old yew tree in the parish of Whitwell.
- The oldest hedgerows recorded are 700 years old (in Empingham and Bottesford.)
- The most frequently recorded tree species was oak.
- The oldest oaks found were stumps aged 272 and 256 in Edmundthorpe and Rothley.
- Few species of willow were recorded, but of those one was found to be 284 years old.



[I enjoyed] playing with quadrats"

"This is the best thing I have done"

It was cool having nature diaries"

"I have enjoyed being a nature detective and when we went out, thank you"

Collecting and Connecting with the Countryside



Collecting and Connecting, a pack that gives young people information on caring for, storing and exhibiting their natural history collections, was produced and piloted at Melton

Carnegie Museum.

Five young people took their collections of precious stones, natural treasures, freshwater shells and bones to the museum for a one-day exhibition. This project aims to introduce museum curatorial skills to the next generation of natural history experts.





Loughborough Brownies

A Loughborough Brownie pack asked CHI to help run some wildlife recording activities. The Brownies selected the badger as their favourite British wildlife, and decided that the project should include finding out about badgers, seeing badgers where they live, and do artwork about badgers and where they live. CHI is working with the group to run the activities in the forthcoming year.

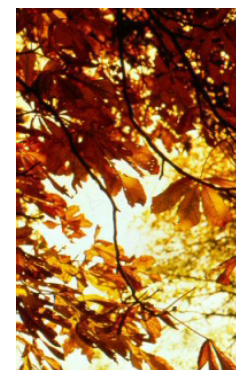
CHI can help groups of young people organise wildlife recording projects. Please contact us if you think we can help.



Changing seasons and frogs

Changes in the timing of seasonal events, such as the first frogspawn sighting and the first snowdrops flowering, are recorded in CHI's Spawn Spot and Season Watch surveys.

2005 saw the earliest frog spawn recorded on the 19th February in Leicestershire, whilst flowers such as wood anemone, lady's smock, purple lilac and snowdrops were recorded flowering earlier than in 2004.



Blackberries fruited earlier in 2005 with an average date of 2nd August. The Autumn Season Watch survey also records leaf colour tint and leaf fall. Leaf fall was later, occurring on average on the 2nd December compared to 1st October and 15th November in previous years.

Ninety five records were sent in as part of the 2005 Spawn Spot survey.

- The total number of clumps recorded between March and April was 628.
- The highest number of frogs found was 100 at a site in Leicester
- The largest number of toads recorded at a site was 30, in Coalville.



Collections/Wildlife recording

The project will also be commissioning educational training boxes on:

- garden insects
- pond insects
- lichens
- mosses

These will support forthcoming training sessions, as well as providing a valuable resource for the future.



The final collections work will be linked to the bumble bee collections, since CHI plan to promote the national bee recording programme. This will be working with members of the Leicestershire Entomological Society.

Wildlife recording

Many people have joined CHI's natural history surveys to record the natural world in their local area.

Results from the surveys are entered onto a database and provide information on the wildlife and habitats of Leicestershire and Rutland. By gathering this data we can learn more about our environment and whether any changes in wildlife populations or habitats are taking place.



The aim of the CHI surveys is to show that anyone can get involved in wildlife recording and that it is fun! By encouraging young and old, valuable recording skills are learnt so that our natural history can be recorded for years to come.

Heritage Wardens

Heritage Wardens are parish based community volunteers who help gather information about the natural and landscape heritage of their local area. Their role is supported by the local parish council.

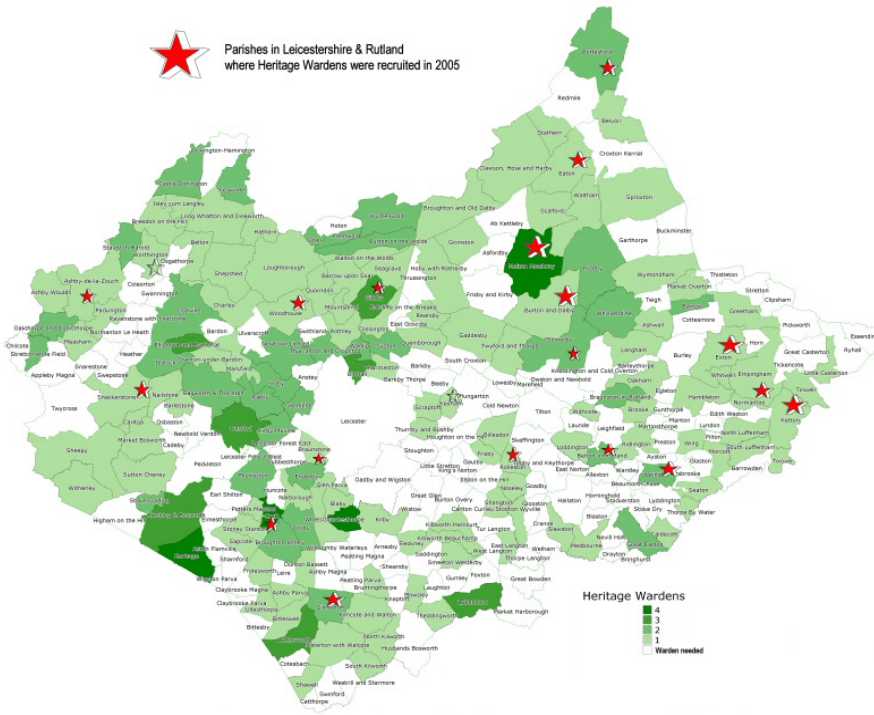
CHI ran a recruitment programme in 2005 through the local media, with presentations to Parish Councils without Wardens.

- There are currently 214 Wardens in 156 (53%) Leicestershire and Rutland parishes
- The network has had Wardens in 59% of parishes since its launch in October 2000.
- 46 parishes have more than one Warden.

Warden support services have also been developed with the production of new parish maps and summaries of records, an enhanced monthly newsletter service and support of the many Wardens who visit Holly Hayes to view their parish files. Additional support to Wardens includes the updated Heritage Wardens' pack and exclusive training opportunities, with the co-ordinator of the Leicestershirevillages.com website running training specifically for Heritage Wardens.



April 2005 saw the first CHI conference hosted at the Severn Trent Water Visitor Centre at Cropston. The theme of Encouraging Heritage Studies in the Countryside attracted nearly 40 Wardens, as well as members of local heritage groups. The day included workshops and demonstrations of recording packages.



Heritage Wardens have continued to be active in their communities:

- helping run or advising local heritage groups
- getting involved in local school projects
- commenting on local planning applications
- fund-raising to help safeguard local woodlands.
- undertaking local heritage studies
- promoting CHI projects in local newsletters

.... to name just a few roles they play!

CHI has continued to support the development of the natural history collections for use by natural history groups, as an educational resource at training days, and through visits to view the collections.



Over the past year CHI has funded local experts to enhance display and interpretation of the ladybird and soldier beetle collections, and butterfly and moth collections.

The project has also prepared travelling cases that have toured libraries linked to a ladybird survey and garden birds, promoting the Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society's Garden Bird Survey.



In 2006 the team will be developing a travelling case on bats, linking to a future project with the Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group, and will purchase a bone collection for the museum collections.

Market Bosworth and District Natural History Society

After hearing how CHI helped other natural history groups, Market Bosworth and District Natural History Society has begun talks with CHI about future support.



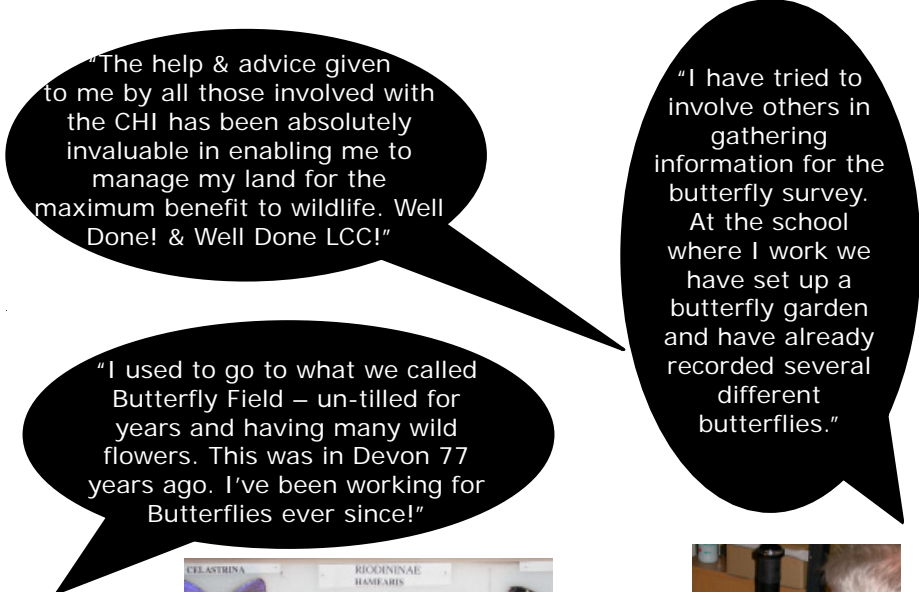
CHI is looking forward to helping other Natural History Societies in the future. Interested groups should contact CHI to explore possibilities.

Butterfly Conservation

Since the Butterfly Bounty project in it's first year, CHI has continued to promote butterfly surveys, and held a celebration evening at the Collections Resources Centre for everyone who took part in the butterfly survey and collection work in 2004.

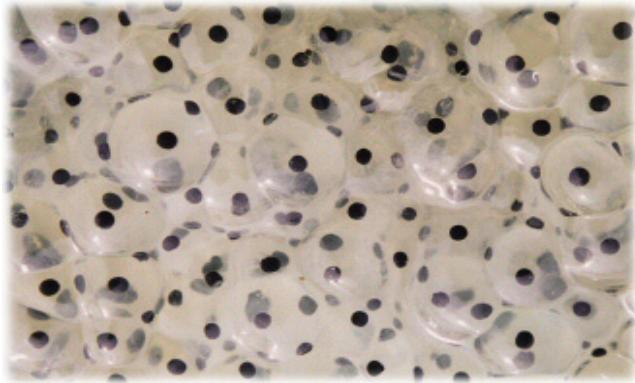
The findings of the 2004 survey were presented and people who took part in the survey were thanked for their fantastic contributions. The group then viewed the improved Lepidoptera collections.

People who took part in the butterfly survey told us:



Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network

The Spawn Spot survey leaflet, written in conjunction with the county recorder for amphibians and Leicestershire Amphibian and Reptile Network, was published and promoted across the two counties. The survey asks people to count clumps of frogspawn and strings of toad spawn to help assess the size of frog and toad populations in the counties, and response was very good.



Frogs and spawn interest or annoy a lot of people, and the Spawn Spot publicity resulted in many enquiries about getting involved with amphibian conservation or dealing with unwanted spawn. People also sent in photos of amphibians found in gardens, which are now online on the CHI website.



"This is the red frog which frequents my garden. He has turned me into a frog-spotter simply because he is so unusual!"

Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society

LROS approached CHI for help to produce a leaflet that would encourage people to record barn owls, redstarts, nightingales, and sand martins, which have all undergone a serious decline. The Biodiversity Bird Survey leaflet generated many barn owl records, but few sightings of the other birds. The barn owl records will help conservationists plan where to put nest boxes and work with landowners.



CHI also worked with LROS to agree how bird records are shared and looked after at the Leicestershire Environmental Resources Centre.

Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group



Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group talked to CHI about organising bat surveys that Heritage Wardens could undertake in their parishes. CHI was able to

help the Bat Group develop the idea, and apply for funding to buy equipment that would help the group promote bat conservation and carry out surveys.

Village bat survey training events are planned for summer 2006.