



Passing on our knowledge: Hawk and Owl Trust and education

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It is vital for any charity or organisation to identify, develop and celebrate what sets it apart from others in the same field. The Hawk and Owl Trust, whilst small, has a number of these unique attributes of which we are rightfully proud and one of those is the education that we offer for schools and adults. A few months ago several key staff met to pin down what it was that we were already offering across our reserves and the Trust more widely, and to identify how we would like to develop this important aspect of the Trust's work in future.

'Education' is a wide cover-all term which contains a greater range of possibilities than perhaps first thought. To many of us 'education' is tied in with school or college days, but we continue to learn throughout our lives, and education can apply to adults. Likewise, we think of teachers directly interacting with classes of pupils, but learning can just as easily be achieved through reading of interpretive materials, attending courses and events or by accessing information through our website. So, there were plenty of avenues for us

to investigate and lots of possibilities for development!

For children, for students and for adults

The Hawk and Owl Trust is well-placed to offer teaching on birds of prey, from identification through to their biology, behaviour and most importantly their place in the wider ecosystem, as well as more practical subjects such as habitat management for wildlife. It is something we do well, and is effective, popular and well-received.

Photo above: Education events at our reserves are practical affairs, with children getting involved with dissecting owl pellets, or pond-dipping, bringing them close to nature.

We already engage with over 3,000 school children each year, visiting us in school groups to the three reserves and there are many that are regular visitors. One of the main challenges for us is the limited number of staff available to offer these face-to-face sessions. Our existing education officers are already working at capacity and so, in order to offer more, we will need to come up with novel options. One that is working very well at Sculthorpe is the partnership with external education givers, Goldcrest Outdoor Education, who have been delivering fun and informative lessons to visiting school groups for several years, and offering us the opportunity to develop the range and quantity of resources we can offer.

Our reserves give us an amazing

opportunity, and perfect venues, for hosting a diversity of adult education as well. Part of the Sculthorpe Fen Appeal plan is to develop courses on animal husbandry, practical land and habitat management and traditional rural crafts, such as charcoal making and hurdle making on the reserve. The reserves also offer places for college and university students to carry out their research, something that has happened in the past albeit on a small scale. Working in collaboration with local higher education establishments also brings other benefits to the Trust, including the chance to carry out further research on our reserves and the wildlife that lives there in association with experts from these colleges and universities.

Remote education - what does this mean?

Remote education refers to having educational materials available for people to access in their own time and without the need for us to have a member of staff or volunteer present. This could involve books, for instance an updated version of our

nestbox guide, or our website. Remote education has huge potential for us as once materials have been created, they can be presented on the website for anyone to access with a minimum of staff time involved to maintain them. As part of our website redesign we have planned a central 'repository' for educational resources, a one-stop-shop if you like of all things bird of prey. We can include downloadable information sheets, videos, lesson plans, the possibilities are endless! These are also far more engaging than simple printed materials.

Another advantage of this approach is that new materials can be added on an ongoing basis, taking the pressure off the Trust's staff to produce everything in one go, yet making what we do have available immediately, and for free.

Advice

A final area of the work of the Trust that fell into this discussion is the advice that we give, encouraging and educating landowners and land managers about the role of birds of prey and owls in a healthy system

Photos - below: Children learn practical skills such as making and siting nest boxes, which leads to further consideration of why nest boxes are needed, and about the life cycle of birds. Survival skills such as shelter-making and foraging are popular, not only teaching new skills, but also encouraging teamwork and social skills. Hawk and Owl Trust.

and the best management options to encourage them. This is such a vital and important part of what we do that we will return to it more fully in a future issue of Peregrine, but within these discussions we were considering how we can expand our current programme and produce and provide more resources to land owners and managers wanting to help birds and wildlife on their land. Our website will be a key part of this, as well as developing courses specifically for this audience which can be held around the country to add to the existing person-to-person advice that our conservation officers already provide.

As you can see, there is a lot still to be done, but we have identified the main areas to concentrate our efforts on to develop and further improve the Hawk and Owl Trust's education programme, and we look forward immensely to bringing an understanding and passion for birds of prey and owls to more people of all ages in the future. If there are any areas you feel the Trust could be doing better towards education, then please do let us know.

