

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY (OWLS)

The 54 acre wildlife classroom by Rob Gayler

The above description refers to the 54 acre site of an outdoor learning centre in Lambourne End where young people, whether they are with school groups or youth clubs etc, can learn a number of skills to develop their talents and develop their characters, to build friendships and exchange views, something which is sadly lacking in Society today. It's manager, Rob Gayler, gave a very detailed and interesting talk on the work which is carried out at the Centre. The site which backs on to Hainault Forest, was left in Trust many years ago and is now managed by Lambourne End Ltd. It's purpose was originally and remains today, to encourage young people and school groups from East London and other urban areas, to experience the countryside with it's meadows, ponds, woodland and adventure activities. It's vision is to challenge young people in the world they live and the people with whom they share it and to experience being outside in the fresh air. The Centre works in conjunction with the National curriculum and attempts to help children who struggle and under achieve and introduce them to new hands-on activities through classes and programmes - a kind of environmental education. It also involves and caters for, disabled children. Mr Gayler explained details of projects and fun activities that children can explore both for themselves and with other people. By doing this, children would develop and learn different things and enjoy outdoor activities. The Centre currently has various water sports, caving, a rope walk and a new abseil facility. The Core elements to the activities revolve around raising confidence and self esteem, improving individual performance, promoting team work, respect for people and the environment, learning and belief in one's potential. The number of groups visiting the Outdoor Centre have risen from 4,500 in 2005 to 15,000 last year. With lottery funding, there are plans for future development with a 'Food for thought' project which is a plan for young people and supporting volunteers, 'Aiming High' which are activities for young people with disabilities and a Volunteer Training Programme, where all kinds of opportunities are available for teenagers and volunteers, dedicating themselves to the work. The key message being, to get out, enjoy activities and learn something different. Twice a year, the Centre has a Family Fun Day and the next event will be held on Sunday 12 September from 11am to 4pm.

The next meeting of OWLS will be on 20 September at Great Stony when 'Bill does Britain' (Bill Coster)

Bob Jenkins

