

Backford's forgotten pond - small changes make a big difference

Backford PSD, Cheshire

Costain

BIG Challenge 2015 submission category: Small scale permanent

Project overview

Backford PSD is a large fuel storage depot in the countryside near Chester.

A pre existing settlement pond at Backford has never attracted much interest before, but after fresh water was discharged through the pond following hydrostatic testing of some of the fuel storage tanks, wild fowl are now embracing the facility.

The staff onsite have taken a real interest in the birds using the pond but due to their high visibility overalls, they couldn't get close without disturbing birds.

To avoid this they decided to build a viewing screen. The screen was built using old scaffolding boards generously donated by a local scaffolding company.

The Backford team didn't just stop at the screen though, they also built a nesting platform using only recycled materials from the site; an old tree trunk has been retained as a bug hotel and the grass cutting regime changed to allow cover and wild flower growth around the pond.



Photo: Backford bird viewing screen

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The pond was largely ignored, with grass cut right to the edges and contained large amounts of decaying material.

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

The work was initiated due to the impacts associated with making a controlled discharge through the pond of a large volume of fresh water.

This was done under agreement with the EA. After the discharge, staff continued to maintain the

pond and soon noticed a positive impact.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

This project shows that by recognising that you have valuable feature and making some simple but effective management choices, a richly diverse habitat can thrive.

The site team showed initiative and started making improvements without outside assistance.

When they started to see birds using the pond following the hydro-testing, they thought "how can we make this better?"

Changing the grass cutting regime allows extra cover for a wide range of species; wildflower growth and leaving a felled tree in situ will support insects; providing a nesting platform and disturbance avoidance is beneficial to the wildfowl.

It was considered that this type of pond habitat is rare in an area which is predominantly agricultural.

The size and way the site is operated mean that the pond can be retained in its current state to provide a long term benefit.

In order to promote the wildlife, the site manager has made poster showing some of the wildlife that he's been able to photograph since the initiative began, which visitors can view when they enter the site offices.

The only cost associated with this project to date is the purchase of some posts for the bird viewing screen; everything else has been recycled.

This success has been distributed across a network of similar sites Costain operate as an example of how great achievements can be made with none or limited costs; it just needs enthusiasm.



Photo: Backford nesting platform

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

The staff are recording the wildlife they see onsite and already believe there has been a net gain. The team are currently looking at ways they can make further improvements and apply the benefits at other sites.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

This project was only possible because the Backford team took a keen interest in the birds they see visiting the site and wanted to create and maintain a habitat that provides long term benefit.