

## Final report to Thames Community Fund

Project name: Community Learning Project  
Friends of the River Crane Environment  
Lead organisation: Frances Bennett



Date: January 2019

The project took place in open spaces adjacent to the River Crane, Twickenham. It was a community learning project that sought to introduce local people to the following conservation skills:

- aquatic marginal planting,
- the restoration of instream deflectors,
- improving access to the riverside spaces increase biodiversity,
- woodland management and coppicing, hedge laying and hedge management,
- grassland management using scythes,
- and grassland management using shire horses.

The sessions over a two year period sought to build the skills of volunteers and make cumulative improvements to the environment of the river corridor.

FORCE aims to foster links between individuals of all ages and the environment, raise awareness of local open spaces and provide learners with conservation skills and knowledge. The sessions were suitable for volunteers of mixed abilities, including some people with no experience. We encouraged the participation of organisations whose clients have little or no experience of conservation work; e.g. the clients of SPEAR a local homeless charity, Richmond Mind, Ruils (an independent living charity), Together as One (a mental health group).

TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) experts in conservation management whom also know the river corridor well, lead most of the sessions. We involved Operation Centaur and their working horses in the sessions some of the sessions relating grassland management and experts who were able to carry out ecological surveys for us – grassland invertebrates, flora and small mammals. The project was managed by FORCE in partnership with Richmond Council Parks Department who supported the project with match funding of £3300 for 2017.



The community learning sessions were complementary to the practical monthly conservation sessions run by FORCE, which aims to support environmental activity in local communities along the river Crane corridor. This project aimed to keep alive heritage crafts and traditions, ensure that there was an ongoing management of the spaces along the river corridor and to stimulate new generations to learn these skills. We introduced people to ecological survey techniques for the first time. The project was designed over two years to allow for continuity of learning and management. We are delighted to have found further funding in December 2018 for a further 2 years until 2021.

The project had the effect of increasing our understanding of local people's needs and aspirations for their local green spaces, and also demonstrated the need for family learning activities. The new project will include more community learning for the whole family.

*Please provide a brief outline of what has been achieved over the last 2 years.*

This project built on previous environmental improvement and community engagement projects which FORCE together with other partners (including The Conservation Volunteers and the London Borough of Richmond) have delivered in the open spaces of lower Crane Corridor. The aim of the project was to involve local people in a series of events over the course of the next year with the aims:

- To work in partnership in order to introduce local people to conservation skills and a variety of traditional techniques aimed at improving access to the riverside spaces and increase biodiversity.
- Build on the skills of volunteers and make cumulative improvements to the river corridor.
- Foster links between individuals of all ages and the environment, raise awareness of local open spaces and provide learners with conservation skills and knowledge.
- Increase our understanding of local people's needs and aspirations for their local green spaces.

*What were your key deliverables?*

The project was made up of 25 days of environmental projects and associated activities including survey work

- Winter Jan /Feb 2017  
Coppicing activity 4 days using TCV to lead the activity on 2 sites Through match funding
- Spring 2017  
4 days hedge laying and hedge management using TCV to lead the activity. Through match funding
- Summer 2017  
4 days of marginal planting activity using TCV to lead the activity to create habitat, manage the river flow by repairing in-channel structures planted with plants that survive in the river flow, or plant up small wetland areas to create habitat.
- Late summer 2017  
Meadow management using TCV to lead the activity with assistance from Operation Centaur  
3 days scything, butterfly identification by volunteers and etymological survey  
2 days grassland management with horses  
1 day grassland management with horses and volunteers

- Winter 2017/8  
Coppicing activity  
3 days using TCV to lead the activity on 2 sites
- Spring 2018  
3 days hedge laying and hedge management using TCV to lead the activity.
- Summer 2018  
3 days of marginal planting activity using TCV to lead the activity to create habitat, manage the river flow by repairing in-channel structures planted with plants that survive in the river flow, or plant up small wetland areas to create habitat.
- Late summer 2018  
Meadow management using TCV to lead the activity with assistance from Operation Centaur  
2 days scything, butterfly identification by volunteers  
The planned etymological survey was replaced by a small mammal survey over 3 days. Community volunteers took part and learned how to handle trapped mammals by an ecologist.  
1 days grassland management with horses  
1 day grassland management with horses and volunteers

*How many members of the community have been reached over the past 24 months?*

The following table shows how many members of the community have been reached over the last 24 months.

Date	Activity	Number
February 2017- December 2018	We have ensured that all activities are listed in electronic listings including our websites, and events websites.	It is not possible to calculate how many members of the community have accessed information about the project.
	Social media posts x 64 posts	Facebook postings are seen by 500 to 1000 people
	Events Leaflets	1700 leaflets
Summer 2017	Information discussions with community groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EMAG (the Ethnic Minorities Advocacy Group), than 50 people</li> <li>• a local organisation working with people at risk of isolation in Hounslow (15 people)</li> <li>• Ruils, a charity that works with disabled people to help them lead independent lives, to their Active Lives group (43 people)</li> <li>• Conference on social prescribing held by Richmond Clinical Commissioning Group.</li> <li>• The project was also mentioned at a Sport London meeting of borough Recreation and Leisure managers called Towards an Active Nation. Sport London are looking at different</li> </ul>	Total 103 people  There were 63 people who attended this conference all working in the NHS or for caring organisations  70 delegates

	<p>methods of engaging local populations who do not currently take part in sports activities. The project was used as an example of “green therapy” by Jason Tong of the NHS Proactive Care Programme of the Healthy London Partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have made contact with SPEAR a homeless charity but not yet managed to talk to their clients.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project days attended volunteers:</li> </ul>	15 volunteers including 4 young people
<p>Total people reached 755 Many of these work within groups and will refer on appropriate activities (+ social media)</p>		
Autumn 2017	<p>Volunteer activities</p> <p>6<sup>th</sup> July 17 Crane Park 19 attendees 19<sup>th</sup> July 17 Crane Park 18 attendees 2nd August 17 at Mill Road - 17 attendees (including 3 young people), 16th August 17 at Mill Road - 13 attendees, 6th September 17 at Meadway Orchard - 10 attendees 13<sup>th</sup> September at Willow Way 6 attendees including 4 young people 18<sup>th</sup> September at Willow Way –8 attendees</p>	91 volunteer attendances including 7 young people
<p>Total people reached 91 (+ social media)</p>		
Winter 2018	Events leaflets Autumn/Winter	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project days attended volunteers:</li> </ul>	21 volunteers including 4 young people
	Social media posts x 6	
<p>Total people reached 21 (+ social media)</p>		
Summer 2018	<p>7<sup>th</sup> June FORCE attended an Environmental Fair aimed at hard to reach communities and distributed information We attended 2 volunteer fairs (Richmond and Hounslow) Summer Fairs x 2 29<sup>th</sup> May FORCE attended a Water Summit for the water industry and included information about community learning activities in the stand and leaflet display.</p>	<p>over 100 participants</p> <p>60 members of the public</p> <p>500 people</p> <p>40 people</p>
<p>Total people reached 900 (+ social media)</p>		
Autumn 2018	<p>Conservation Volunteer activity Meadow work/river margin work</p>	27 volunteers

	Mammal survey work Reptile survey	26 volunteers including 5 children 3 volunteers
	2 community events which included information about our project We have given informal talks to Richmond MIND clients and a Richmond based independent living charity.	200 people  60 people
Total people reached 900 (+ social media)		
Winter 2018	Pollarding	30 volunteers
January	Hedgelaying	30 volunteers (estimated)
Total people reached 60 (+ social media)		
Excluding leaflets and social media the total number of people reached directly by the project is 2726 people Many of these people worked with other organisations that support vulnerable people. They have also reached out to their clients and told them about the opportunities available.		

*Of these how many were children / adults?*

There were 20 young people involved in volunteering activities. It is not possible to calculate the number of young people who were reached by the project

*How many of these people experienced a positive change in their behaviour as a result of the project? How did you measure this?*

- There have been several positive comments on social media as a direct result of the work carried out in the park. This indicates that people value the park and wildlife as a result of the work carried out. We have received a greater volume of this type of comment over the last 2 years.
- Much of the work carried out is located next to the main pathway through the park and positive comment from local people as they pass by. There has been several positive comments that illustrate a change in attitude:
  - *We are so grateful for all the work you do, Crane Park looks better every year.*
  - *Thank you for all that you do. I do love walking through the park and spotting all the wildlife.*
  - *Fantastic work. Such an asset to our area.*
- We are given positive feedback at community events and information sessions. Local residents are positive about the opportunities that the project offers.
- Involving operation Centaur gave the opportunity to make a positive statement about the management of the park grassland areas and to demonstrate that the spaces were managed and maintained. The work carried out was very visible to people passing on busy road networks. Litter although a problem in the park is managed and park users are more aware of the impact.
- There were 15 volunteers who were new to conservation volunteering, all returned to take part in at least one more session

- 2 volunteers have become volunteer officers with TCV. These officers receive additional support and training in order to take on the role of supporting other volunteers and the work that they carry out.
- 70% of volunteers who attended community learning sessions returned to work with the project again.
- 18 volunteers came out at least twice to attend the project to improve the river Crane corridor showing their commitment to the project.
- None of those who volunteered to take part in the mammal survey work had ever taken part in this type of activity before. We have had requests to repeat the activity from some participants.
- 26 people took part in a small mammal survey and as a result of the project have a better understanding of the place of small mammals in the local ecology and understand the importance of maintaining habitats for their benefit. Volunteers also took part in insect and flora surveys

*Did anyone gain new skills from the project?*

TCV taught conservation techniques including methods of marginal river habitat creation, techniques for repairing in-channel structures planted with plants, pollarding and hedge laying those who attended the volunteer sessions.

FORCE trustees and Richmond Council Ecology officer worked with Operation Centaur to understand the practicalities and implications of working with horses to manage an area of grassland. We can use these to further develop the management of open space in the Crane Valley.

The school children had a first experience of conservation volunteering and learnt new conservation techniques around grassland management.

FORCE trustees learnt that including volunteers in the environmental survey work has the potential to tell a positive story for the environment of the river corridor in a newsworthy way. There was significant interest in the findings of the survey work from the public.

FORCE trustees have learn how to conduct a reptile survey and how to involve the public. As a result of this positive experience we are preparing a project which will include more surveying by residents. Trustees have researched how habitats could be improved for the benefit of reptiles.

*What benefits did people gain from the project?*

- Local people have had the opportunity of being involved in volunteering working as part of a team that has directly benefited the local environment.
- Local people have benefited from understanding the ecology of local spaces and can use some of the techniques that they learnt in their gardens.
- Local people learnt new skills including traditional conservation skills.
- Park users have told us that the work has improved the park for their benefit and the benefit of wildlife.

- We worked with a postgraduate student working towards an MA in Interpretive Environments. She worked with FORCE and TCV to design and manage the installation of the stag beetle habitat as part of the work to interpret interactions between people and habitats. This work will feed into a larger project to be undertaken in South London, but it gave her the opportunity to test out some of her ideas on a smaller scale.

*Have you worked with any other organisations, if so who?*

We have worked closely with a number of other organisations in order to deliver the project:

- London Borough of Richmond Parks and Open Spaces who are the landowners and manage the open spaces. We hold monthly steering group meetings with them and TCV to review progress of this and other projects.
- TCV who have delivered the learning/volunteering sessions to local people. We have planned activities with them in detail and reviewed outcomes.
- We have worked with Operation Centaur at Willow Way with the working horses.
- We worked with a student from Central St Martins UAL as part of her MA course in interpretive environments
- The leaflets have been distributed widely to local charities working with members/clients who would benefit from these activities. We know of 6 participants who have attended sessions through these organisations.
- We worked closely with professional ecologists to design the ecological surveys for flora and invertebrates and Alison Fure of Furesfen Ecology to design the mammal survey work which involved participation from the local community. She worked closely with the volunteers to set small mammal traps and check them over 3 days. We have shared the findings of these surveys with the borough ecology officer and placed the survey on the website for others to use.

*How many volunteer hours have been done on the project?*

Date	Number of volunteers	Volunteer hours
Summer 2018	21 volunteers	122 hours
Winter 2017/8	31 volunteers	408 hours
Additional work	Wetland scrapes and hedge maintenance	160 hours
Summer 2018	65 volunteers	390 hours
Autumn 2018	53 volunteers	396 hours Including 78 hours of volunteer time relating to the mammal survey
Winter 2018	28 volunteers (Estimated)	168 hours 2 activities day are scheduled for early January.

Including our work on the giant loggery we have spent 13 days from May to January working in the park.

This has engaged a total 53 volunteers with an average turnout of 12 people per session. In that time we have improved 250m of waterway, 590msq of meadow and created 9 new homes for nature (loggery's and dead hedges) and laid 50m of hedgerow.

3 FORCE trustees have volunteered their time to manage the project over the last 2 years. This has been estimated at 160 hours over a 2 year period.

Total number of volunteer hours = 1804 hours

*Were any of these volunteers Thames Water employees?*

No we were unsuccessful at involving Thames Water apprentices in the project.

*How many positive press releases have there been regarding the project and how have you ensured Thames Waters involvement has been recognised?*

We have used social media (See [www.facebook.com/friendsrivercrane](http://www.facebook.com/friendsrivercrane) [twitter.com/friendsrivcrane](https://twitter.com/friendsrivcrane) ) extensively to advertise the project and report on individual activities.

There was one press release which acknowledges the work of all partners and Thames Water funding for the project in July 2017. We will write an end of project report in Spring 2019 acknowledging the work done and support of Thames Water.



**Photo record Summer 2018**



*Shire horses visit Willow Way  
September 2018*



*Reptile survey  
July/August/September  
2018*

*Mammal survey in Crane Park*



*Community learning sessions July 2018  
Meadow management and river margin improvements*



*August 2018*