

Volunteers keen to get started at Stirk House

It seems we chose the perfect night to meet our new Stirk House volunteer group; despite torrential rain being forecast all week, it was a beautiful summer's evening as the eager new volunteers met up for their first briefing, keen to find out what roles and duties they were going to be assigned.

After going through the obligatory paperwork and safety information we got down to business and first on the agenda was the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) who run a nest recording scheme in which we were keen to include our volunteers. The scheme involves checking the small-bird nest boxes around the site on a regular basis and recording various information, including what species are found, what stage the nest or young are at and how successful the nest has been. This information is then passed on to the BTO to aid their important ongoing research. The group were really enthusiastic about the task and, armed with their nest identification posters, were keen to get up the ladder to have a look for themselves!



Checking the nest boxes
Photo courtesy of Rebecca Gregory

As we are now coming to the end of the small-bird nesting season many of the boxes contained only empty nests, however this didn't appear to curb anyone's enthusiasm. Despite the nesting season being nearly over, there is a chance that some birds may continue to have a second or third brood, so it

is still worthwhile monitoring at this late stage. You never know what you might come across! Alas, the work won't end with the season and as we go through to winter time the boxes will need cleaning out ready for a fresh start next year – another task our fantastic volunteers have taken on.



Collecting nest records
Photo courtesy of Rebecca Gregory

Next on the agenda was the care and maintenance of the wildlife hide, a great resource for allowing close up encounters with unsuspecting animals. The hide has proved to be very popular amongst hotel guests and many are keen to record what they have observed. Our volunteers are going to provide the vital link between visitors to the grounds and the World Owl Trust by relaying the wildlife sightings to our conservation team, who can then work towards monitoring and maintaining the different species which make Stirk House their home.

Work is progressing well on the site with the erection of small bird, tawny owl and barn owl nest boxes. Plans are also in place to install cameras which will allow guests and visitors the opportunity to watch these secretive birds from the comfort of the hotel lounge. Future developments include the addition of a nature trail through the site, as well as hedgerow planting and other habitat improvements.



Stirk House grounds
Photo courtesy Paul Caddy

From far afield, hotel guests enjoy watching the wildlife within the grounds. It is however, local people that Stirk House is eager to encourage, as it is their interest and involvement that will undoubtedly make this project a success.

The volunteer group will be an invaluable connection between Stirk House Hotel, the World Owl Trust and also the local community, allowing us to expand our conservation work further afield whilst simultaneously encouraging local people to enjoy their surrounding wildlife. If you would like to learn more about the project or are interested in joining the Stirk House volunteer group please contact us for more information on: 01229 717 393.

Rebecca Gregory