

# National Wildflower Centre



One of the UK's flourishing new generation of 'green destinations', the National Wildflower Centre in Knowsley, Merseyside, brings wildlife into the urban environment. **Grant Luscombe**, Chief Executive of Landlife, the organisation behind the Centre's development, explains how it is both educating visitors in the ways of wildflower conservation and promoting the creation of new wildflower landscapes nationwide.

The deluge that hit Britain last autumn is a foretaste of climate change to come. Hotter summers and wetter winters will be the norm, habitats moving northward at a rate of 50 to 80 km per decade. This shocking scenario threatens the very basis of conservation strategies, yet world leaders find themselves unable to agree, let alone achieve, carbon reduction targets.

Alongside rapid decline in species richness and diversity, we have reached a point where recovery programmes are desperately needed for so-called 'common' flowers, not just the rare ones.

A new Millennium Project in England's North West is pioneering wildflowers for people. The National Wildflower Centre opened this year in a public park on the fringes of suburban Liverpool. The Centre evolved from the work of the creative conservation charity, Landlife, which bid for Millennium Commission funding and brought together a group of partners, including Plantlife (a British wildflower conservation charity) and the national Wildlife Trusts, to develop the Centre. Funding was successfully sought from the Northwest Regional Development Agency and the European Regional Development Fund's Objective One programme.

The National Wildflower Centre's stunning new visitor centre, over 150 metres long with a rooftop walkway, has just won a RIBA award for its design and is a modern 'working wall' with café, shop and work space. Alongside is a secondary courtyard in traditional cobbled Victorian style, which houses an exhibition, crafts and workshop space plus meeting rooms and a multimedia classroom. The Victorian buildings were part of the Gladstone family home in

the park, and blend the old and the new to celebrate wildflowers' role in our future as well as in the past.

Set in a 35-acre public park in Knowsley, 'The Wildflower Borough', the Centre is a place where people can learn more about wildflowers in an informal way through demonstration gardens, exhibits, events and seeing plant and seed production in the walled garden. It is also the base of a new organisation to promote the creation of new wildflower landscapes nationally. In partnership with leading conservation groups, the first year has seen conferences in Liverpool, London and Wolverhampton, covering genetics, climate change, woodland wildflowers and wetlands. Our extensive publications programme offers advice and guidance for gardeners and educators alike.

In our first year of opening, we are developing seasonal wildflower demonstration areas, and trying a series of events and open days to encourage visitors to find out more. In partnership with Knowsley, we are also working in the park surroundings to provide a hub for the local population to enjoy. A group of artists has been working on wooden and recycled metal sculptures and glassworks to engage visitors through visual arts. Environment fairs bring issues of sustainability, transport and recycling into conservation and ecology.

It is a venue all year round for training in creative conservation, conferences, meetings and professional events. Spaces include a multimedia classroom, glass conservatory, library and outdoor areas. Landlife, the charity that founded the Centre, has offices in the complex, from which it has organised training events using these facilities for over 1,000 representatives of environmental organisations.

The National Wildflower Centre is broadening the celebratory role of sustainable wildflower landscapes and encouraging their appeal to a wider public – not just the passionate gardeners and botanists! Do we get the landscape we deserve, or do we strive for something better? People have always manipulated the environment for their own purposes – convincing evidence shows that habitats created on a large scale can be sustainable and potentially make a dramatic impact on declining populations of once common species. They need the right starting point and clear objectives. Social justice and inclusive practice also demand that we make nature accessible for people wherever they live.

The National Wildflower Centre wants to demonstrate that the concept of nature conservation is about flexibility: getting the conditions right to achieve something better. Over a third of urban areas are open spaces, places close to people. How can we help to restore intimate contact with nature, to inspire, and to create healthy living spaces and local habitats for wildlife? The new National Wildflower Centre is making its own contribution.

## National Wildflower Centre

[www.nwc.org.uk](http://www.nwc.org.uk)

<b>1. SET-UP FUNDING</b>	<b>£m</b>
Millennium Commission	2.00
NWERDA	0.60
European Regional Development Fund	0.45
Other & Equity	1.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.35</b>
<b>2. VISITOR ELEMENTS</b>	<b>Floor space (m<sup>2</sup>)</b>
Internal space	600
External space	10,000
<b>3. ANNUAL VISITOR TARGET</b>	<b>25,000</b>
<b>4. NORMAL ADULT ADMISSION FEE</b>	<b>£3.00</b>
<b>5. OPERATING AUTHORITY</b>	
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