

Rail station wildlife gardens to receive stamp of approval from Norfolk Wildlife Trust

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Community efforts to boost nature at rail stations are to be rewarded with an official accreditation from Norfolk Wildlife Trust for station volunteers' efforts to improve biodiversity at rail stations

Greater Anglia has partnered with Norfolk Wildlife Trust to formally recognise the achievements of its team of volunteer 'station adopters' to create wildlife havens at stations across its network through the new 'Greater Anglia Wildlife Friendly Stations Accreditation Scheme'.

Norfolk Wildlife Trust is leading the accreditation scheme, which will later be rolled out to include Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire Trusts to cover the whole of Greater Anglia's network.

Norfolk Wildlife Trust has just completed the pilot phase of the project, surveying four stations in Norfolk – Thetford, Brundall Gardens, Cantley and West Runton – and assessing them for how well they support local flora and fauna.

Chief Executive (interim) of Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Kevin Hart said: "The alarming decline in the abundance of wildlife and the plight of species under threat means that just protecting the nature we have left is not

enough; we need to put nature into recovery, and to do so at scale and with urgency. We are working to create a nature recovery network across Norfolk – and with fellow wildlife trusts across the UK – to create more space for wildlife.

“This project with Greater Anglia is a fantastic example of how people can transform nature-poor areas into new nature-rich places – and change the way we think about land, seizing opportunities to help nature outside traditional nature reserves.”

Of Thetford the ecologist, Rebecca Evans, said, “This is a fantastic site for wildlife because it transitions through a range of habitats, from diverse planted borders of shrubs and flowers nearest the station itself, moving through areas of grassland, getting increasingly ‘wilder’ until it becomes quite dense scrub and treeline at the end. It is well cared for by a group who have considered wildlife while they maintain the platform, with a compost heap, bird boxes in the more mature trees, feeders and even bird baths that give a constant supply of water.”

Each assessment also offers tips and advice for how to make the stations more wildlife friendly and the reports can also be used as examples of best practice to help spread good ideas around all Greater Anglia’s stations.

Greater Anglia’s Customer and Community Engagement Manager, Alan Neville, said, “We’re delighted to partner with the region’s wildlife trusts to formally recognise the valuable work of our station adopter volunteers in supporting wildlife and improving their local environment.”

“This is all helping the railway in East Anglia to lead the green recovery from the pandemic by being a much greener way to travel – and our new fleet of trains will contribute even more thanks to their more environmentally friendly features which reduce CO2 and particulate emissions in the region further still and offer a convenient, comfortable alternative to the car.”

Rail stations in East Anglia are increasingly becoming havens for local wildlife thanks to the efforts of volunteers who have transformed land the equivalent of five Olympic-sized swimming pools into thriving wildlife gardens.

Greater Anglia’s team of station adopters – who help to look after their rail stations for the benefit of their communities – increased the total area of station garden across the network by 14% last year and devoted much of it to creating wildlife friendly areas. The gardens, some of which have been developed over many years, are becoming havens for local wildlife populations – with the railway increasingly being recognised by ecologists as a ‘green corridor’ which provides a sanctuary for many different kinds of flora and fauna.

In a recent survey, Greater Anglia station adopters reported a wide range of creatures visiting their stations including many different types of butterflies as well as bees, slow worms, bats, foxes, deer and many varieties of birds, recording more than 200 different species.

Greater Anglia has joined the rest of the rail industry in pledging to make stations across Britain more sustainable.

Action to reduce waste, support local wildlife and cut the carbon footprint of railway stations will be informed by the industry's new Sustainable Stations: Best Practice Guide, which details ways in which train operators can meet this commitment in support of global goals of decarbonisation, reducing waste and supporting local plant and animal life. The document will also be used by train companies when agreeing future contracts.

With rail accounting for just 1.4% of transport emissions despite representing 10% of all journeys, rail companies want to go further, faster, to get the UK on track to meet its net-zero commitment.

Norfolk Wildlife Trust's vision for a Nature Recovery Network envisages a landscape in which nature reserves are connected by corridors of habitat, through which wild species and their genes flow freely. Crucially, people are also personally connected to wildlife and wild landscape, for their own wellbeing and for the benefit of nature.

Photo credit: Greater Anglia