**Essex Country Parks nature scheme to benefit county’s wildlife**

*The second phase of a programme to support nature recovery and increase wildlife in over 1,000 hectares in the Essex Country Parks is to launch.*

The second phase of an ambitious landscape restoration project that will benefit wildlife within the Essex Country Parks is launching on World Nature Conservation Day (Monday 28 July).

The government backed Countryside Stewardship Scheme supports a long-term nature recovery programme. It will enhance habitats and increase the variety of plant and animal life in over 1,000 hectares of the Essex Country Parks.

The second phase will see Belhus Woods, Cudmore Grove and Marsh Farm Country Parks begin works that support declining rare and protected species of flora and fauna. The first phase saw grassland and woodland restoration projects take place at Hadleigh, Weald and Thorndon Country Parks.

The new programmes complement the work being undertaking to support biodiversity in the parks.

The works at Belhus Woods, near Thurrock, include projects to restore wood pasture and grassland. Red Poll cattle will be introduced to graze the pastures as a natural land management method. The grassland and woodland restoration encourage the growth of flowers, fungi and specifically benefits the Shrill Carder Bee.

At Cudmore Grove on Mersea Island, projects include the installation of new livestock fencing to protect overwintering birds and waders, such as Avocets and Redshanks, from predators. The marsh is an important ecosystem which captures carbon, stores floodwater and recycles nutrients. Work to encourage Hog’s Fennel at the park is also taking place to support the rare Fisher’s Estuarine moth.

Works at Marsh Farm Country Park, near South Woodham Ferrers, will see improvements to the ditches take place to benefit water voles. Managing the water levels will encourage wetland plant growth and support water voles, amphibians, such as frogs and newts, along with freshwater invertebrates.

The restoration works at Marsh Farm will see livestock fencing installed to allow heritage breed sheep to graze the marsh and wildflower meadow. The sheep keep the grass at the ideal length for migrating birds to feed on. They will also help improve the variety of wildflowers in the meadow which benefits insects and pollinators.

Managed by Essex County Council, the eight country parks hold local, national and international significance due to their rich mixture of landscapes. From coastal salt and grazing marsh to ancient woodlands and grasslands, many of the parks have areas that are Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas and Ramsar wetland sites.

Councillor Mark Durham, Cabinet Member for the Arts, Heritage and Culture, said: "From coastal marshes to ancient woodlands, the Essex Country Parks team oversee a vast and varied landscape. This significant project aims to boost biodiversity and preserve these historic landscapes and habitats for future generations to appreciate.

“I’m pleased to confirm that all work being undertaken at the Essex Country Parks is carefully planned with ecologists from our Place Services and approved by Natural England."

**-Ends-**

**Notes for editors:**

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**Explore Essex:** Explore Essex brings together a unique group of Country Parks and heritage venues which are owned by Essex County Council. Its mission is to deliver a broad range of exciting facilities and activities for the people of Essex with an emphasis on culture, heritage and environment. [www.explore-essex.com](http://www.explore-essex.com)