

## **FESTIVAL OF NATURE**

**Friday 5 – Sunday 7 June 2009**

An annual event is organised by the Bristol Natural History Consortium, comprising Avon Wildlife Trust, BBC Natural History Unit, Bristol City Council, Bristol Zoo Gardens, Defra, Environment Agency, University of Bristol, University of the West of England, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and Wildscreen and includes volunteers to help it to run smoothly.

A full programme consisted of drop-in activities in 25 tents, talks by leading naturalists, outdoor screenings of nature television programmes, 'Living with Environmental Change' debate, 'Darwin Now' Exhibition and Wildlife Tours of the Docks. Talks by leading naturalists included Stephen Moss of the BBC Natural History Unit and Albatrosses, Dolphins and Sealions of New Zealand. The 'Living with Environmental Change' Debate featured Pat Thomas, Editor of 'The Ecologist' and Lizzie Gillett, Producer - The Age of Stupid (<http://www.ageofstupid.net/>), 'Darwin Now' Exhibition; and Wildlife Tours of the Docks.

The drop-in activities in over 25 tents over both days, were based on the work of large and small charities, from the National Trust and RSPB to smaller groups such as the Bristol Natural History Society. The 'Wild Bristol' tent that I volunteered in, involved partner groups Bristol City Council (Parks and Tree team), Forest of Avon, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery, South Bristol Riverscapes Project, Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project. The tent included a flowing stream and woodland areas where participants – families, school groups, anyone! – could undertake an interactive quiz as well as crafts... making birds to place as part of the stream.

Schools could attend on the Friday and did so in large numbers, the rain unfortunately dampening progress in some tents and areas, but not dampening spirits. Public days on Saturday and Sunday saw bright, skies and huge crowds, after a shaky start with some showers. Though based on Bristol and its wildlife,

most of the activities and ideas were, in my opinion, reasonably generic and focused on raising awareness of the natural world and promoting sustainability in a general sense. With the majority of activities being free – the wildlife tours carried a minimal fee –there were plenty of opportunities for everyone.

I highly recommend this for families and schools groups. For details of next year's event and volunteering opportunities, see <http://www.festivalofnature.org>.

***Henricus Peters, NAEF Executive who volunteered at the event***