



Restharrow Scrape Development Project

The article below was provided to the Sandwich CommunityAd Magazine by the East Kent Mencap fundraising manager.

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Sandwich CommunityAd Magazine

Birdwatching With East Kent Mencap

East Kent Mencap is a local charity which provides opportunities and choices for people with a learning disability, enabling them to achieve the things they want out of life. We run numerous projects and activities to enhance our members' lives.

Our bird watching group are all adults with a learning disability, who come along to our Day Resources in Thanet and Herne Bay. The group have been visiting Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust (SBBOT) for over 14 years to observe the birds and other wildlife it attracts. With the support of staff, many have also stayed overnight at the Observatory, watching the night birds and enjoying the dawn chorus – a unique experience that gets them even closer to nature. The project encourages members to be physically active and gives them a greater appreciation of and understanding for wildlife. As well as watching the birds, the group take photographs, which they have exhibited across Kent, including at SSBOT itself.

Recently, the group worked with SBBOT to advise on making their hides more accessible and some of the groups' photographs now feature on some of the new ones – a real highlight for our members. As a charity, the group relies on donations to be able to buy expensive equipment to aid their interests. So, it was a wonderful surprise when staff member Louise posted on the SBBOT's Facebook page asking for advice on recommending binoculars and was donated a free pair! Louise commented, "Our members are fascinated by the many birds that visit the Observatory. Some of them have been coming along for years and are incredibly knowledgeable about the different species. We had a rather old pair that are quite heavy and these new binoculars are so light and easy to focus, allowing members of the group to see so much more detail. The gentleman who donated the binoculars is himself a keen bird watcher who understands how much pleasure it brings our members. It was such a lovely gift and means a lot to know that other people care."

The photograph shows our member Gavin looking through the binoculars to one of the scrapes, which attracts waterbirds.

Louise explained, "Gavin can get quite agitated but he finds the open space at SBBOT very calming and takes a keen interest in the wildlife. We greatly missed visiting SBBOT during the pandemic. Once restrictions lifted, it was one of the first places we went back to as being in the open air meant our member felt less anxious and could relax with friends once more."

This is just one of many groups East Kent Mencap runs for its members. If you'd like to support the charity and help people with a learning disability thrive, you can make a donation at www.eastkentmencap.co.uk.

Jane Brooke,
Fundraising Manager

