

## Engaged Youth Award

### Shortlisted: Felbeck Trust Outdoor Classroom

Felbeck Trust cares for our countryside by restoring pockets of neglected land, creating stepping-stones for wildlife in Norfolk's agricultural heartland - making a positive change to the natural environment, enhancing biodiversity and improving our rural landscape. Our innovative charity believes in the value of nature, volunteering & shared purpose - bringing people and communities together to benefit wildlife and help combat rural social isolation. All habitat management work is done by local volunteers, wherever possible using traditional tools, techniques & materials. Different from national groups, our sustainability comes through local engagement & participation - learning together to care for our countryside.



(Picture: Aylmerton Field Studies Children in Sustead Common)

Felbeck Trust was registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in October 2016. Since then we have signed 10-year agreements with the National Trust and North Norfolk District Council to manage two adjoining plots at Sustead. Both sites were previously neglected and un-loved, the unchecked growth of scrub and bramble preventing public access. We have cleared and extended pathways, restored wildflower meadows and excavated a seasonal pond, creating a quiet oasis for nature and a place for peaceful enjoyment for local communities and visitors. Our site is bisected by the Gur Beck, a headwater of the River Bure and, working with the Upper Bure Valley Partnership, we are steadily improving water quality to the benefit of native aquatic wildlife.

The site has become a regular fixture in the curriculum for children studying at the nearby Aylmerton Field Studies Centre, whose Director, Mark Holroyd, says:

*"Sustead Common is a beautiful 'oasis' that provides a quiet relaxing atmosphere which encourages children to take in their environment and listen to its sounds. We hope to encourage the visiting children to begin to consider the sometimes delicate balance between agriculture and nature while enjoying the beauty and tranquility of the Common. Some of the children are from deprived backgrounds and some of them may never have been into the countryside before. They search for wildflowers, grasses and insects on Sustead Common, learning to use binoculars to identify birds, using Felbeck Trust's shelter and bird screen as an outdoor classroom. The contrast between Sustead Common and the surrounding farmland sparks discussion about where food comes from and the demands made on the countryside to provide space for food, farming, leisure and wildlife."*



*(Picture above: Children observing birds from the Hide)*

*(Picture below: Building a bird box)*



The Trust now holds a 2-year management agreement on Spurrell's Wood, a 5-acre woodland site, adjacent to our original projects. We have been working hard to raise funds to meet a time-limited opportunity to buy the wood from its current owner. Our fundraising campaign began in September 2017 and we have now raised close to our target. We hope to complete the purchase by Christmas.

Together, these three sites make up the former Sustead Common. Through this purchase, Felbeck Trust aims to complete the reunification the old Common, creating a vital refuge for nature and a place for people to enjoy.

Regular species monitoring, conducted by our volunteers and local experts, demonstrates the value of improvements we have already made to the natural habitat. Survey evidence demonstrates that a number of rare and threatened species, listed in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, are already present and we plan more work to protect the habitat that will help prevent further species loss and protect the ordinary from becoming rare. Working with Norfolk Wildlife Trust, through their Wildlife in Common project, we aim to achieve County Wildlife Site status for the former common, thus providing greater protection of this site for the future. [www.felbecktrust.org.uk](http://www.felbecktrust.org.uk)

