

Jenny James describes the work that has led to her receiving a conservation Award



I have always been interested in conservation work, the environment and gardening as it creates spaces for people and an opportunity to observe nature.

Within my town of Bradley Stoke, just outside of Bristol, I got involved with a local nature reserve and community litter picks. When I was going through the discernment process to become a member of the Iona Community, I decided to do a project that would benefit my community and that I would enjoy. I thought about setting up a local group to help the local park, which became "Friends of Meade Park" in Stoke Gifford. A few friends and local residents came to form the committee, and we began doing community activities which included litter picks, organising tree walks by local ecologists and wild flower planting, alongside a successful community Facebook group and Twitter feed set up in 2018. It has since expanded to include a local conservation area known as "40 Acres" which is opposite Meade Park. The group is still going after all this time. We obtained funding from the local parish council and community foundations.

Last year I was elected to my local Town Council, and they needed conservation representatives for two woodlands. The skills I had gained were able to transfer when I joined the committee for Splatts Abbey Wood and Sims Hill Community Woodland, as the representative from my local Town Council. Splatts Abbey Wood is an ancient woodland between Stoke Gifford and Filton on the edge of Bristol, and Sims Hill Community Woodland is part of a new housing estate called Cheswick Village. What needed doing was to develop a presence on social media and to involve the new communities growing around the woodlands. Sims Hill Community Woodland had to be completely redeveloped due to ash dieback, and many trees had to be felled. However, it did mean people were committed to continue with new saplings and for a new community woodland to grow. Creating links with the local residents and UWE was very gradual and productive, and now our workdays involved both students and local residents, doing activities like coppicing, litter picking, maintaining the pathways, nesting boxes, bramble removal, hedgerows and wild flower scattering, alongside all the necessary tool training!!

I was very shocked and surprised to receive an email over the holidays from the Chair of South Gloucestershire saying that both the students and I were recommended for a Community Award for our voluntary conservation activities in both woodlands. It is very humbling to think that alongside the committee, representatives from the Forestry Commission and local Conservative MP, that local residents were willing to make the nominations. It is for the community that we all volunteer to keep the woodlands going. I am grateful too, for those people in the Iona Community encouraged me through the discernment process to pursue my deep concern for the environment.