**Report from 2 July introduction to outdoor swimming sessions, BFER event**

In the first Healing Waters event of 2023, just over 80 people came to Lynford Water (with the event approved by Forestry England), to have a go at swimming outdoors and learn about doing it safely.

We had sessions for adults, youth groups and families and children, and 42 adults and 39 children aged between six and 16 attended, took part in an interactive briefing while dipping their toes in the water. They then immersed in the water which was warm at 20.4° though there was a chilly breeze. We had great fun with ball games and practising starfish floats.

The event was for those who had not yet tried outdoor swimming or were new and wanted to find out more, and the lifeguard cover and other support gave people the chance to try something new which they might not have done otherwise. Many said that they would be doing lots more outdoor swimming, having being given confidence by the day. We were particularly pleased to welcome several local youth groups, as a key aim of the project is to spread the message of safe and enjoyable outdoor swimming among young people and families.

Volunteers were crucial to the day, with 14 local swimmers with a range of swimming experience and knowledge doing the practical running of the event and talking to participants, encouraging them, answering their questions, and getting in the water with the participants to chat, pass on their experience and enjoy the water with them. And the lifeguards, most trained by the project, helped people to feel safe.

Preparation for the day included risk assessment, arranging lifeguarding, insurance cover, and giving pre-event information to participants on risks, cold and water quality. We tested the water at the event venue for Bathing Water quality in advance of the session, using EU BWD aligned bathing water quality standards and an accredited UKAS lab, and the result of testing samples taken 20 June was 'Excellent'.

The event was held at a busy and popular place for recreation, and volunteers talked to passers-by who were very interested to hear about the project and the activity, and about our next event on 20 August, introduction to basic life saving. Up-to-date information will be on the website, <https://www.imogensriverswims.co.uk/blog/os-brecks-2/dates-set-healing-waters-swimming-project-beginning-2020/>.

We have followed up the event with detailed information to supplement that given on the day, about safety, risks, benefits, care for the environment, in a note available on this website <https://www.imogensriverswims.co.uk/blog/issues/z-more-info-on-outdoor-swimming-september-2020/>. We also did a shorter version of this, also on the website, <https://www.imogensriverswims.co.uk/blog/issues/swim-play-in-water-safely-q-a/>.

The project promotes people keeping themselves safe when outdoor swimming. This is an increasingly popular and fun outdoors activity for all ages, with benefits to mental and physical health, and is a great way to get close to nature. These events throughout the project have given

people the chance to do this in a safe environment so that they can learn how to go and enjoy it for themselves. We have seen people joining local informal swimming groups and carrying on swimming. Feedback from this and previous events has been very positive, in evaluation forms, emails and on social media.

A key purpose of the Healing Waters project and all of **The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme (BFER,** <http://www.brecks.org/BFER/>**) projects** is to promote and to study the benefits of engaging with nature and outdoor activity. So we asked participants to take part in surveys at the event.

Selected feedback quotes:

From participants

*Thank you so much for the open water swimming introduction experience that you provided today. We all enjoyed it very much and the girls have asked when they can attend again! Parents that were in attendance also showed a keen interest to have a go. (Youth group leader)*

*A big thank you to all the lovely volunteers for making today's swim session possible. Looking forward to the next adventure! It was great to meet so many amazing people today.*

*It was an incredible experience and so grateful to have attended! It was the perfect introduction for me and feel so much more comfortable attending a group*

*It was a lovely event with like minded people! Thanks for organising and enabling people to build confidence in outdoor swimming!*

*It was really lovely to meet people and find confidence to join [the local swim group]. L [volunteer] was super supportive. Thank you*

*Thank you for such a fab morning with a bunch of lovely people! You’ve made my day!*

*We will definitely be doing outdoor swimming again. Really enjoyed it. I feel very reassured and more confident.*

*All concerns have gone now I have experienced/taken part. I just want to swim more!*

*Less fears, good speaking to a volunteer.*

*It was very good, I feel confident to do it by myself and to join a group.*

From volunteers

*I enjoyed the day and was happy to take part.*

*I really enjoyed it, was such a brilliant idea to organise it !*

*I had such an enjoyable day chatting to all the different people and watching bugs! I look forward to helping again.*

*I did enjoy it, in particular becoming aware of the benefits for the children.*

*A lovely day volunteering with the @thebreckslp open water swimming introduction.*

From lifeguards

*Great* [*#lifeguard*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/lifeguard?src=hashtag_click) *day at* [*#Lynford*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Lynford?src=hashtag_click) *today with more opportunities for people to experience* [*#OpenWater*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/OpenWater?src=hashtag_click)[*#swimming*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/swimming?src=hashtag_click)[*#wildswimming*](https://twitter.com/hashtag/wildswimming?src=hashtag_click)

*It’s always a pleasure coming to the events. I love the passion and the message you’re conveying to the community.*

Photos from the event, c.ImogenRadford, are here:

* Swim Intro 020723 Best HW <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjALpA9>
* Swim Intro 020723 Adults HW <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjALpQr>
* Swim Intro 020723 Youth Groups 1,2 HW <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjALpvV>
* Swim Intro 020723 Youth Groups 3, families 1 HW <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjALtN3>
* Swim Intro 020723 families 2 HW <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjALpi3>
* Swim Intro 020723 HW Lifeguards, volunteers <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjALpRZ>

The trainer and lifeguarding team, David Ebbs and his colleagues, who has been working with us throughout the project on other events, are on Twitter here: <https://twitter.com/EbbsEbbs>.

BFER printed swim hats from [www.swimprint.com](http://WWW.SWIMPRINT.COM) were provided to all participants and volunteers, partly for visibility for the lifeguards and as a souvenir and a way of promoting the project and BFER.

The company we use for water quality testing, Swim Safety (<https://swim-safety.co.uk/>) provides water quality testing and analysis services for a large number of open water swimming and triathlon events and venues in the UK.

We are grateful to the help and authorisation of the landowner for the venue, Forestry England and their Thetford Forest staff.

The event was part of the Healing Waters project, supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund, part of **The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme** <http://www.brecks.org/BFER/>

More information about the project, <https://www.imogensriverswims.co.uk/blog/os-brecks-2/>, and about future dates, <https://www.imogensriverswims.co.uk/blog/os-brecks-2/dates-set-healing-waters-swimming-project-beginning-2020/>.

The next event is 20 August, venue to be confirmed, introduction to basic lifeguarding.

There are opportunities to volunteer in this and other BFER projects – Contact Imogen Radford or the BFER team to find out more.

Sign up for [BFER updates and newsletter](http://eepurl.com/heiGCD).

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