

Talk Abstract for Organic Producers Conference 2010: Maintaining our own inspiration ... and infecting others!

It is a generally recognised fact that people who exert the most influence for 'their cause' and who get positive results are those who best maintain their own inspiration and infect others with their passion. 'Inspiration' usually comes from within ourselves as a result of incidences - eureka moments - that have occurred to us at some time in our earlier life. By recognising and reliving these incidents they can be a constant source of inspiration to us in our daily efforts to take forward our current work, whatever that might be. I will mention 'incidents' that helped me choose and get me through my career and invite those of you at the workshop to recognise similar eureka moments that have helped or can help in your own lives. I will be drawing on a few of the ideas from the book: "*From Hippos to Gazelles - how leaders create leaders*" by Philip Goodwin and Tony Page who recently ran a course for VINE Members. (ISBN 978-1-904235-45-3, 2008). Inspiration 'from within' is a hugely powerful force that can be helpful on a daily basis!

Introduction:

1. Now for something a bit different from me!
2. So, how do we value biodiversity and ecosystems? OR, to remove the jargon - wildlife and the countryside. For me I have been privileged to work on some fantastic wildlife sites across the UK and have seen great wildlife spectacles.... But it was not always the case.....
3. First, a couple of depressing memories in my career... and also a couple of inspirational wildlife moments. I have repeatedly drawn on these depressing and inspirational moments to motivate myself throughout 40 working years.
4. Then, two minutes for you working in pairs to swop a wildlife or countryside moment that inspires you in your work. (Recognising and remembering these pleasurable 'incidents' can inspire us to value what's around us during our everyday work).

So, to set the ball rolling ...

5. First a 'depressing' memory: My farming career started on our home farm in the 1950's and 1960's – a farm that used every possible new chemical manure and spray that became available. We not only sprayed all the crops with weed killers and insecticides (both organo-phosphorous and organo-chlorines) but

also the field and farm boundaries – there was not a green leaf to be seen that was not part of a crop.... and a good dose of DDT was laid around the perimeter – nothing lived that crossed it! AND I shudder to think that we actually ate some of that food ourselves!

6. Second an inspirational memory: next to our farm there was a valley woodland – a beautiful mixed woodland of birch, hazel, hornbeam, ash, chestnut, oak, willow – managed as ‘coppice with standards’ on a 15- 20 year cycle. In Yr 1 - 5 bare ground at coppice time colonised with beautiful woodland flowers of all the colours of the rainbow; in Yrs 6 -10 bramble and other tall herbs, in Yrs 10-15 scrub species. What did this management produce? A fabulous dawn and evening chorus – the bird song was deafening! On summer afternoons the whole place ‘buzzed’ with insects, butterflies, dragonflies and birds! All the senses were activated at once.
7. **Those two experiences led me to leave farming and take up a career in wildlife management.**
8. Now an inspirational memory from wildlife management: In the 1970’s I was lucky enough to manage some chalk grassland reserves on the south downs; on one five hectare slope: 45 species of flowers in a sq metre of turf; including 7 species of orchid; 33 species of butterfly– skippers, browns, blues (Chalk Hill, Adonis, Small, Common), 35 species of breeding birds. Midsummer afternoon – walking through the seeding grasses and flowers with the scent filling ones nostrils, along with clouds of butterflies rising up at every step that were uncountable being in such profusion. Wow what a sight!
9. Then a depressing memory: the land over the fence rich in exactly the same way with wildlife but that due to a quirk or ownership was now being ripped up by ploughs in order to grow grapes! I like wine... but surely there is a right place for both food production and wildlife!
10. **I have used these experiences – both good and bad - over the years to motivate myself in helping to look after those few**

special sites known variably as National Nature Reserves and SSSIs.

11. For most farmers, even organic farmers, the wildlife on your farms may not be quite so spectacular as what is seen on such special sites or for instance on David Attenborough's programmes; but it is 'special for your farm and for you! For instance I can just as easily relish the hooting of a Tawny Owl on a moonlit November night proclaiming his territory; the February song of a Mistle Thrush singing loudly in a storm telling of the promise of spring to come; watch the aerobatics of swallows and martins over the meadows in June as they catch their food; or the kestrel hovering over the fields.

Now its your turn:

12. Please now turn to the person sitting next to you and take one minute each to describe say two of your countryside or wildlife pleasures.
13. Hang on to... and draw on those and other examples as you go about your work.
14. These ideas of developing our own 'personal stories' as they are called are developed further in the book "From Hippos to Gazelles – how leaders create leaders" by Philip Goodwin and Tony Page, published by Kingsham Press www.akdpress.com The thinking being that 'our story/stories' will be far more inspiring to others than any amount of cajoling or lecturing!
15. If this has aroused something in you, you might like to follow it up by going to the VINE website: www.vineproject.org.uk and take a look at the material there. You might even like to join the VINE Discussion Forum where we discuss and explore issues surrounding farming, countryside, wildlife, nature conservation, climate and the environment. The contact to join is Sophie Lake our Secretary : sophie@vineproject.org.uk
16. If anyone should want to contact me my email address is: john.bacon@phonecoop.coop