

## **Biesbosch and Hospitality STEP Workshop June 2013**

Marianne den Braven, Manager of the Biesbosch Visitor Centre, gave a presentation on how the Biesbosch National Park Authority is working with businesses on sustainable tourism.

She said tourism businesses are vital to maintain and develop the area and co-operation is key. A number of entrepreneurs have taken on the role of Ambassadors for the Park, championing sustainability issues and setting an example for others to follow.

Marco Verdouw, Hostel Manager of Stayokay, Dordrecht explained how entrepreneurs and officers from the Biesbosch visited the Lake District to learn about the successful visitor giving initiative run by Nurture Lakeland.

He said it was a big challenge deciding how to make it work in the Biesbosch but they decided the main thing was not to let the government get involved and to use co-operative thinking.

They decided to add a small voluntary sum to visitors' bills, and to put the money collected into lots of small projects, rather than a few large ones. Projects might include signposting a canoe route, cleaning small beaches, and cutting trees to keep footpaths open, which would benefit a large number of people.

Marco said he got businesses involved by "being irritating and annoying" and giving talks. He told businesses that if they came on board the scheme would part-fund projects which would benefit their visitors, and therefore create more business.

By April 2013 the scheme was launched with 15-20 entrepreneurs ready to sign up and by June there were just over 30. A board of five entrepreneurs choose which projects will be part-funded by the visitor giving pot. There is also an advisory board and specialist members, but neither the park nor the government is involved. The scheme is hoping to raise 50,000 euros this year for four projects and 100,000 euros next year.

Bird boxes are used as novel collection boxes and cuddly native toy animals, such as beavers, with visitor giving labelling, are sold to raise money. People can also donate by phone.

The workshop was asked for ideas on how to keep the businesses involved and how the businesses could get their guests involved. This did not create a great deal of discussion although there was much interest in the scheme.

One of the participants bought the furry beaver, brought along as an example, for a birthday present for a friend, and put his donation in the bird box!

**Hilary Franzen, Press Officer, Broads Authority**