

Lost Effra – led by London Wildlife Trust

Imagine if every household in London depaved their front garden, built a green roof on their shed or fitted a water butt to capture rainwater from their roof...



What is Lost Effra?

Lost Effra is an ambitious initiative that aims to demystify sustainable drainage, inspiring local people to take action and work with nature to reduce flood risk. We engage with communities along the catchment of the culverted river Effra in south London, empowering people to use green infrastructure to increase urban resilience whilst also improving their neighbourhoods for both people and wildlife. Our ultimate aim is to create a resilient community that independently takes action to reduce flood risk and utilise rainwater as a resource to support nature in this highly urbanised and socially diverse area of London. The project is made possible by support from Thames Water, the Greater London Authority and Lambeth Council, as well as input and assistance from a range of local stakeholders, community groups and private sector partners.

Communication is key to all aspects of Lost Effra, firstly through encouraging local people to engage with the need for SuDS, then motivating them to take action on a household scale and providing the skills, knowledge and support needed to do so. In December 2014 we published a community facing guide entitled *'Living with Rainwater'* to explain the concepts of SuDS and how to go about creating their own green roof, digging a rain garden, depaving their garden or installing rainwater harvesting.

What are the drivers behind Lost Effra?

The project is based in Herne Hill and Brixton, both areas along the historic course of the River Effra that are vulnerable to flash flooding, attributed in part to the Effra. They are highly urbanised and heavily paved areas that have been seen to benefit both environmentally and through social cohesion from the implementation of urban SuDS features.

The widespread rollout of SuDS on a scale necessary to have a significant impact on urban flood risk depends on community level action – people improving drainage and creating new green spaces in their own gardens and communal spaces. However through observing the sector, we noticed that the majority of communication about SuDS is aimed at industry professionals as opposed to citizens. We are therefore aiming to provide an alternative narrative of SuDS in order to make them engaging and effective by carefully aiming communication at a citizen level. By showing that SuDS can be accessible and appealing, we are encouraging and enabling household scale implementation, shifting peoples' perspectives to see water as a resource rather than a waste product and facilitating small scale implementation that adds up to have a significant impact on the local area and its water.

How do we engage communities and enable sustainable water solutions?

- **Real world delivery:** we support and enable communities to create SuDS by working in close partnerships with local people. These projects educate local people, making them skilled advocates of SuDS and providing high quality local demonstrations of community led initiatives and the range of benefits that they bring to local people and their environment;
- **Community SuDS guidance:** we produce appealing and jargon-free information about household scale interventions to help manage water sustainably. All information is available free of charge online and in print through local community outlets;
- **Skills workshops:** we deliver sessions that educate people about how to provide necessary tools and knowledge to enable them to undertake their own projects, including green roof group builds and rain garden tours. All events are heavily subsidised or free of charge in order to be accessible to all;
- **Accessible events programme:** we run an ongoing programme of evening talks, guided walks, film screenings, creative sessions and community events to engage people with issues in urban water management, discuss opportunities for community involvement and motivate people to take action.

What are the impacts?

Since January 2014 we have engaged with over 2,000 people through a range of activities including 25 inclusive events. We have worked with communities to construct 5 green roofs, create the largest rain garden in Lambeth, remove 558m² of impermeable surfaces and created capacity for 4,400 litres of rainwater harvesting. The project is run by one full time member of staff and SuDS are created with small budgets, to show how high impact outcomes can be created through simple and affordable interventions.

Living with Rainwater, Community SuDS guide, produced December 2014 (available online at <http://issuu.com/londonwildlifetrust/docs/living-with-rainwater>). Written and illustrated by London Wildlife Trust, designed by Jonny Hughes Design and printed by the Newspaper Club.



Photos: From left to right: Community volunteers at rain garden planting day at Cressingham Gardens (April 2015); local people help plant and sow seed at a depave project at Rosendale Allotments (March 2015); green roof workshop participants help to build green roofs on shipping containers in Sydenham Hill Wood, Dulwich (February 2015).



Support for the Lost Effra project

- **Dan Rogerson, Minister for Water** (March 2015): *“This is a great example of how we can help local communities to be innovative and benefit the local environment - improving water quality and boosting biodiversity.”*
- **Simon Barnes, the Times** (28th June 2014): *“It’s a small and local and community type of project that drops a pretty big hint about the way we should manage our cities and our water and the way we live with nature...”*
- **Jessica Bastock, Flood Risk Officer at Lambeth Council:** *“From de-pave schemes to disconnections of downpipes into rain gardens, all the schemes has been embraced by the community and showcase what can be done in the urban context.”*
- **Emily Montague, local community volunteer:** *“Schemes like this bring together local communities and by education and demonstration show people what can be done to improve surface water drainage and increase wildlife - I personally was inspired to de-pave our flat front garden as a result of the project!”*