

Beauty spot gets the seal of approval

NORTH Manchester environmentalists are celebrating the news that Blackley Forest has been awarded Local Nature Reserve status.

The award marks the forest's recognition as a site of biological importance, and last week's official launch included a guided walk by the Friends of Blackley Forest, and a falconry display by guests from the Cheshire Water Life centre.

Blackley Forest joins Chorlton Water Park to become only the second Local Nature Reserve in Manchester. The forest was created in 1953 to commemorate soldiers who died in the Second World War.

The 19-hectare forest is now officially a Grade B site of natural beauty which has the River Irk running through it, and boasts many good examples of broadleaved trees, a rich variety of ground fauna and a diverse mix of habitats, including meadows and ponds.

Now managed as part of the Irk Valley Project, the site provides a variety of leisure activities such as fishing, walking and informal envi-



Visitors marvel at a local "dignitary"

ronmental education opportunities, and the land contains features of specialist interest, approved by English Nature.

Councillor Neil Swannick, Executive Member for Planning and Environment, added: "Blackley Forest is a tremendous resource for the local community. We hope that many more people will now be encouraged to use and enjoy all that it has to offer. Local Nature

Reserves are a key part of the strategy to make Manchester greener and ensure that the city's wildlife is protected for future generations."

Richard Cowell, assistant Executive Member for Planning and Environment, said: "A huge amount of hard work has been put in by the Friends Group and many individual volunteers and partner organisations to make Blackley Forest a Local Nature Reserve.