Cheshire children go wild

05/11/2012

Children in Cheshire are going wild. But it's nothing to do with bad behaviour. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded Cheshire Wildlife Trust a grant of £77,500 towards its Wildkids project.

Wildkids will take up to 300 Cheshire schoolchildren from around 25 schools out of the classroom and into the countryside to connect with their local natural heritage and wildlife, many for the first time.

Cheshire may be one of the greenest counties in England but many of its children live in urban communities with limited access to their own green spaces. Many have never visited the meres, woodlands, meadows and nature reserves around them.

The project will draw on two areas of Cheshire and use two nature reserves reclaimed from industrial land. Children from the more deprived parts of Crewe will visit Astbury Mere Country Park, a former sand quarry in Congleton, and children from Halton will visit Wigg Island, an old industrial site on the River Mersey near Runcorn that has been revitalised as a nature reserve.

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "Getting young people out into their local natural environment and teaching them new skills is so important. Wildkids will encourage up to 300 children, from built-up urban areas, to explore, learn from and enjoy the wonderful wildlife and habitats that surround them. They are the future custodians of our natural heritage so enthusing them at an early stage is crucial. We at the Heritage Lottery Fund are delighted to be supporting this project that will help ensure these places live on for future generations."

Small groups of around a dozen children, aged 7 to 11 years, will be encouraged to discover their natural environment, with the emphasis on informal, practical learning. They will find out about local species of animals, insects, birds and plants, and their habitats, and how seasonal changes affect them. They will also learn some bush craft and survival skills such as how to light a fire, and will enjoy natural art sessions and sensory activities.

Research by Play England shows that children spend less time playing outside than their parents did, and that outdoor activity has a positive impact on behaviour, emotional intelligence and learning in a classroom environment. Parents, teachers and the wider community are also likely to reap the benefits.

Children who don't always thrive in a formal school setting often discover skills and interests in an outdoor setting that they can then apply at school. A sense of achievement and new maturity are then carried back into the classroom.

At the end of the project there will be family events and an opportunity for the children to showcase their activities and learning. Wildkids hopes to propagate a legacy of people visiting their local green spaces, appreciating their natural heritage and thereby investing in its future.

"The HLF money will enable us to deliver an inspirational programme of environmental education," says Nick Rowles, people and wildlife officer at Cheshire Wildlife Trust, "But also a lot of fun. We hope that our Wildkids project will benefit not only the children who participate but their families too, and that more people start visiting and enjoying the natural world around them, and, who knows, inspiring a new generation of conservationists along the way."

Further information

HLF press office: Laura Bates 020 7591 6027, email: lbates@hlf.org.uk.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust: Tom Marshall, Communications Officer, 01948 820 728, email: tmarshall@cheshirewt.org.uk.