Going wild in the North Pennines

26/10/2011

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has today awarded a confirmed grant[1] of £316,300 to the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership[2] for an exciting biodiversity conservation project; WildWatch North Pennines.

The three-year project will support a network of volunteer wildlife groups to help record and conserve valuable biodiversity within the North Pennines AONB[2]. One of England's most special places, the North Pennines AONB is a stunning landscape made up of open heather moors, dramatic dales, haymeadows and tumbling upland rivers and is home to a wealth of wildlife. But information about many habitats and species in the area is very sparse, making conservation difficult.

Over the course of the project, up to five volunteer groups and 150 people will be trained to survey and record in the surrounding area. A new online portal will be created as an accessible space for volunteers to record their data and share it with local communities and conservation organisations. This data will help inform ongoing conservation efforts and help the long-term survival and protection of the area and its wild inhabitants.

Activities for volunteers and trainees will include learning how to identify grassland fungi to help us locate important grasslands, analysing bat sound recordings to help find important hibernating sites, and running moth traps. There will be activities which the wider public can help with too, such as reporting sightings of more obvious animals such as adders or hedgehogs.

Ivor Crowther, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: “This stunning landscape gives so much to so many people, be that beautiful views or a chance to get up close with some of the North of England’s most precious wildlife. This project will ensure that as many people as possible get the opportunity to get involved with this special area and help protect it for future generations. The Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to be involved with this project and know it will be a great success.”

Chris Woodley-Stewart, Director of the North Pennines AONB Partnership added: “There really is something for everyone in this project, from those with little or no experience of wildlife spotting to those who are accomplished recorders. The spirit of the project is about everyone sharing their experience and knowledge and learning from each other as we go.

“Those who want to get really involved will be able to join or form a local group, get training from expert practitioners, and take part in organised surveys or practical conservation work to help the North Pennines.”

Notes to editor

- [1] A confirmed award means that money had already been earmarked by HLF for the project in question and that the full amount has now been secured.
- [2] In recognition of its special qualities the area has been designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The North Pennines is also a European and Global Geopark - highlighting its globally important Earth heritage.

- The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of the finest landscapes in the country. It was designated in 1988 and at almost 2,000 sq. kilometres it is the second largest of the 46 AONBs (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and is one of the most peaceful and unspoilt places in England. The North Pennines AONB Partnership is a strategic alliance of 25 public, statutory and voluntary sector bodies with an interest in the future of the AONB. The Partnership's Staff Unit takes action to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area, to raise awareness of its special qualities and to improve the quality of life for local people. The Staff Unit is based at the Weardale Business Centre, The Old Co-op Building, 1 Martin Street, Stanhope, Co. Durham DL13 2UY. Call 01388 528 801 (info@northpenninesaonb.org.uk), visit www.northpennines.org.uk or follow us on:
  Facebook: www.facebook.com/NorthPenninesAONB
  Twitter: www.twitter.com/NorthPennAONB
  YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/northpennines

Further information

- For the Heritage Lottery Fund, please contact Laura Bates on 0207 591 6027 or lbates@hlf.org.uk
- For the North Pennines AONB Partnership, contact Elfie Waren or Andy Lees on 01388 528 801 (elfie@northpenninesaonb.org.uk or andy@northpenninesaonb.org.uk)