Saving Derbyshire’s great trees and their legends

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Now, a project to capture these stories and give the trees better protection has been made possible by a £45,200 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The Derbyshire Wildlife Trust will be recruiting local volunteers to carry out a range of tasks. The Trust is building on a major tree survey, funded by an earlier HLF grant, which identified and mapped more than 4,000 veteran trees, some of which were found to be of not just regional, but of national importance.

The ancient trees, some of which are thought to be over a thousand years old, are important to the landscape and for wildlife, providing a habitat for many rare and endangered species. Among their number are the Old Man of Calke, an oak tree thought to be more than 1200 years old, and the remains of the Betty Kenny Yew in Shining Cliff Woods near Crich which is believed to be even older. This tree was said to be the inspiration for the lullaby Rock-a-bye-baby in a tree top.

Although some of the identified trees are protected within reserves or sites of special scientific interest, most are outside such areas and have no legal protection. The project Saving the Great Trees of Derbyshire will train volunteers to help them monitor the condition of trees locally and spread awareness of their value. They will also be able to spot specimens at risk and take action to save them with specialist support.

Where there are local legends these will be documented and an archive created on the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust’s website. A programme of special events will also be devised to engage further public interest, including guided walks and craftwork for children and families.

Land owners, managers and local communities who have ancient trees locally will also be able to find advice online detailing how they can protect the older trees in the future.

Emma Sayer, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East Midlands, said: “As well as their importance to the landscape and to nature conservation these magnificent trees have in many cases contributed to local folklore. This project will protect all these aspects and is especially appropriate as it is beginning within the International Year of Biodiversity.”

Commenting for Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Jo Brown Conservation Manager, said: “We are delighted that the HLF are supporting this project. Our survey showed that many ancient trees are at risk because their value is not recognised, and we hope that by helping people celebrate their local trees we can make sure they are still around for future generations to enjoy.”

Notes to editors

The Great Trees of Derbyshire project received a £45,250 HLF grant in 2006 and ran for two years enabling some 4,000 great trees to be identified and their locations mapped.

Local legend maintains that the lullaby, Rock-a-bye-baby relates to a couple in the late 18th century, Betty Kenny who lived with her husband Luke, a charcoal-burner, and their eight children in a huge yew tree in Shining Cliff Woods where a hollowed-out bough served as a cradle.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 39,900 projects, allocating over £4.4 billion across the UK, including £227million to the East Midlands alone.

Further information

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