Moray and Highland children take action to save rare wildlife

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The Highlands are home to 40% of the UK's rare and declining species. Surprisingly little is known about the biodiversity of the region, and few people have the skills to expand our knowledge to help with conservation efforts.

HLF Scotland has just given two-year funding for a new Wild things! project: 'Young Ologists'. This new project will introduce children to natural habitats in their local area so they can understand the distinctive wildlife and rich biodiversity of these magical places.

Accompanied by experienced, knowledgeable and friendly leaders, each child will have the opportunity to become an 'ologist' for the day. They will practice at a 'hand's on' level some of the conservation techniques used by: mycologists (fungi), herpetologists (amphibians), entomologists (insects), lepidologists (butterflies/moths) and apiologists (bees), phytologists (plants), zoologists (animals) and ornithologists (birds).

Enjoyable project activities will include using a hand lens to observe detail, identifying wildlife tracks and signs, and hunting for unusual mini-beasts. Children will identify species and learn how to submit a biological record. Their involvement will help to expand our knowledge of Scotland's biodiversity and support much needed conservation action.

'Young Ologists' will help to increase awareness about the wide range of environmental sciences, their practical applications in the field, and potential for future careers. It will support the delivery of the 'biodiversity and interdependence' section of the Science Curriculum for Excellence by enabling pupils to develop the skills of scientific enquiry through practical techniques in the field.

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, said: "Our environmental heritage offers a rich resource for education and it is wonderful to see it being used by Young Ologists in such an innovative way. It is providing powerful and memorable experiences for the children, making learning fun and opening their eyes to the natural world which surrounds them. Young people are the future custodians of our heritage so their passion for it is vital if we are to keep it from being lost forever."

This exciting project will create a new generation of people who appreciate and care for Scotland's nature to ensure its survival in future years.

Notes to editors

- Founded in 2003, Wild things! has become one of the leading providers of environmental education programmes in North East Scotland. At least 1,200 children and young people benefit every year.
- Wild things! piloted 'Young Ologists' and evaluation found that 100% of children enjoyed the course and 100% wanted to repeat their activity. Feedback from teachers included: "brilliant for children to see nature and their local environment at close quarters," "personally I found it very inspiring and will use the ideas on my own." Feedback from children included: "We were four different things in the forest we were botanists, zoologists, ecologists and entomologists," "I loved it and want to do it again."

- ‘Young Ologists’ will build on the charities successful environmental education programmes for primary schools which already include Forest School, Ancient Woodland Day Trips, Coastal Classroom, Holiday Wild Camps and Nature Club.
- The Curriculum for Excellence states that: “The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences.” (Learning Teaching Scotland 2010).

Further information

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