£1.7m National Lottery grant to protect UK's marine life



Looking for seaweed

The project will train over 3,000 volunteers – making it the largest experimental marine citizen science project ever undertaken in the UK. The volunteers will collect data around key species and it is hoped the new research will help inform future policy and conservation strategies.

The project is led by Newcastle University's Dove Marine Laboratory and involves the universities of Hull, Portsmouth, Bangor and the Scottish Association for Marine Science. It also involves a number of organisations including the Marine Biological Association in Plymouth, the Marine Conservation Society, Earthwatch Institute, the Natural History Museum, Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Cefas and the Coastal Partnerships Network.

"Collecting this information about our coastlines is vital if we are to protect them for the future but we can't do it without the help of the public," explains project leader Dr Jane Delany, a senior lecturer in the School of Marine Science and Technology at Newcastle University.

"What this project aims to do is develop a network of citizen scientists who can help us build an accurate picture of marine life all around the UK - a baseline against which we can better understand the impact of climate change and other environmental and human factors.

“It gives us the opportunity to carry out the same experiment at the same time across different latitudes and environmental conditions to gain an accurate picture of the ecological processes in the marine environment. This data will then feed into a national database and inform future policy, conservation and science.”

Dr Nova Mieszkowska of the Marine Biological Association explained: “What is unique about this project is the level of experimental work involved. Rather than just facilitating volunteers to record where species occur, ‘Capturing our Coast’ will empower them to answer scientific questions, about species interactions and impacts on the marine environment. This will have enormous benefits for our understanding of how marine ecosystems are changing.”

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF, said: “With a coastline stretching over 18,000km, the UK benefits from an extensive and rich marine environment. Capturing our Coast is an innovative project that is empowering people to get out and explore this wonderful part of our natural heritage today whilst helping secure it for future generations.”

This new project builds on previous work led by Newcastle University through the ‘Big Sea Survey’. Launched in 2010, the team recruited 357 citizen scientists to log flora and fauna along a 150 mile stretch of coastline from St Abbs to Saltburn.

Collecting 350,000 separate records over three years, the team identified a number of organisms which had previously not been seen so far north such as the rare stalked jellyfish and an invasive species of sea squirt known as *Corella eumyota*.

“One of the criticisms of citizen science is the accuracy of the data collected,” explains Dr Gordon Watson of Portsmouth University.

“What is unique about this new national project is that we will turn all our volunteers into ‘specialists’, working on their own chosen topics or species. The novelty of this new training scheme will allow volunteers to work alongside scientists in an unprecedented way.”

Through the Capturing our Coast project there will also be the opportunity for wider engagement with communities across the UK through workshops, social media and other events.

The project will be open for volunteers wanting to take part from September 2015. For more information and to register your interest please email bigseasurvey@ncl.ac.uk.

Further information

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