

Schoolchildren at St Mary's Primary School inspect the young fish

Primary school children in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, are taking part in a unique classroom project to restore the Ballinderry River to its past glory.

Pupils at St Mary’s Primary School in Dunamore have been rearing trout in their classroom and releasing them into the river which runs a hundred yards or so from the school grounds.

It’s all part of a scheme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to increase the survival of Freshwater Pearl Mussels.

The children were given a batch of Lough Neagh Dollaghan trout eggs early this year by Frank Mitchell who looks after the hatchery at the Ballinderry River Trust, which runs the project. They were kept in a fridge in the classroom until the fry hatched.

Now that they are big enough to survive, Frank has returned to the school to help the children release the young fish into the river.

The re-stocking of trout is only part of the Ballinderry River Freshwater Pearl Mussel Rescue Project. The river is home to a unique population of freshwater pearl mussels which is in danger of becoming extinct, and the trout fry form part of their lifecycle. Microscopic mussel larvae called glochidia live the earliest part of their lives within the gills of the young

fish, where they cause no harm. When they are big enough they drop to the riverbed where they live the rest of their lives. So increasing the number of trout improves the chance of survival for the freshwater pearl mussel.

“It’s been great," said 10-year-old Daniel Hargney, as he released a trout into the fast-flowing stream. “It’s so educational and I’ve learned so much about the Ballinderry River.”

Paul Mullan, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, added: “This is a truly exciting and innovative project. It’s early days yet, but all the signs are positive that one day, perhaps when these P7 children are themselves tending the land, there will be a healthy population of mussels and trout in the Ballinderry River once more. An entire community and a precious landscape are all being transformed thanks to National Lottery players.

"The Ballinderry River Trust is doing an extraordinary job and we are delighted to be supporting it.”



Getting to grips with the wildlife in Ballinderry River

Schoolchildren help local river life thanks to National Lottery players