

Urban orchard takes root

Children from Chillingham Road Primary School donned their wellies and braved the wind to plant Newcastle University's urban orchard. At Cochrane Park the class of six-year-olds, with the support of Councillor Nigel Todd (Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport at Newcastle City Council), helped launch Newcastle University's biodiversity strategy by laying the foundations of this orchard which it is hoped will bring benefits to the local community for years to come. It is envisaged that once fruiting this orchard will be opened to schools as a learning resource, as well as enhancing the educational programmes run by EastEnd Health at the Cochrane Park allotment 'Wor Lotty'.

After a learning session delivered by student teachers, the children also put their newly-learnt knowledge to good use by taking part in a photography competition. They explored Cochrane Park and took photos of things related to biodiversity, with some very imaginative children declaring they were exploring Madagascar! It is through engagement projects like this that the University hopes to promote biodiversity and the wider issues relating to it to both those within the University environment as well as with external bodies.

The biodiversity day which the children took part in reflected the University's new biodiversity policy which aims to enhance biodiversity across the University estate through implementing practical projects, raising awareness of biodiversity found on the estate and engaging in outreach projects with local schools, communities and organisations. Throughout the autumn and winter, activities have been taking place, from tree trails to bird box building workshops, with staff and students enthusiastically taking part.

As part of the University's commitment to enhance biodiversity, a biodiversity action plan for the estate is being developed, setting targets for biodiversity achievements. These have been developed in order to improve habitats and encourage species to university sites, as well as linking up with regional initiatives such as the Newcastle and North Tyneside Biodiversity Action Plan and Newcastle City Council's 'Bee Aware' campaign. Such targets include the completion of an estate wide habitat survey to establish what resources we already have and how these can be improved, the development of pollinator gardens across campus to raise awareness of and aid the declining bee population, and the creation and instalment of bird and bat boxes in appropriate locations.

Many events and activities have been planned for 2012 with the goal of integrating biodiversity fully into University life in the hope that we can further demonstrate our institution's environmental leadership.

If you would like any more information regarding the University's biodiversity commitment or how you can get involved, please get in touch with the University's Biodiversity Coordinator, Zoe Webb (zoe.webb@newcastle.ac.uk).