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Press release

A shining example: Our award-winning young conservationists

Environment Minister Steffi Lemke awards Biodiversity Prize in cooperation with Zoo and Tierpark Berlin | €2 million for species conservation

The “Climate-protecting super polar bears” of the Lina Morgenstern school in Berlin’s Kreuzberg district have a dream of a better future – and a number of ideas for how to achieve it. They aim to transform their urban school grounds into a green space, to plan group days out exploring local forests, and to set up bee hotels and nest boxes in their schoolyard. For them, the most important thing is to spread the word and get everyone involved. Their commitment to nature attracted the attention of the jury of Zoologische Gärten Berlin’s Biodiversity Prize, who awarded first prize to the project. The award was presented by Germany’s Federal Environment Minister Steffi Lemke and Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem.

A total of five Berlin schools won prizes for their creative project ideas, all of which incorporated concrete efforts to protect and promote biodiversity. The winning school classes and working groups were invited to attend the award ceremony at Zoo Berlin. “I found it very difficult to decide who should get how many points, as we received so many wonderful ideas from such committed kids,” said jury member Willy Weitzel, a well-known children’s TV presenter and science journalist. “I would like all these young conservationists to know how impressed I am. You are a real inspiration for many other people, young and old. Keep up the good work!” School pupils in the bee working group at Barnim grammar school in Falkenberg, for example, want to set up an educational nature trail that teaches their fellow pupils all about the industrious insects. Meanwhile, pupils at the Gerhardt Hauptmann grammar school will use their prize money to erect deadwood fences, create water sources for birds and insects, and put up bat nest boxes in their schoolyard. “The goal of our Biodiversity Prize is to support young people who already care about the environment and the climate,” said Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem during the award ceremony at Zoo Berlin. “It will enable them to strengthen their commitment to building a better future for our planet and help make it a more diverse, colourful and pleasant place to live for generations to come.”

Federal Environment Minister Steffi Lemke is the patron for the Biodiversity Prize, which was awarded for the first time this year. “Zoo and Tierpark Berlin have discovered some real conservation heroes,” she said at the event. “Your commitment will inspire more people to get involved in nature and species protection.” Healthy ecosystems not only provide



important resources, clean drinking water and pure air, they also ensure fertile soil and will help humanity adapt to the consequences of climate change. “I am always happy to meet dedicated young people who are really proactive when it comes to protecting the environment,” said Lemke, addressing the school children. “We need more heroes like you.”

€2 million for species conservation

Human beings have had a negative impact on the natural world almost everywhere on the planet. The destruction of natural habitats, environmental pollution, overfishing, and intensive agriculture and forestry – all perpetrated by humans – have pushed species and habitats across the globe to the brink of destruction. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently lists almost 37,500 animal and plant species as threatened. That is far more than ever before. And yet there is hope! With the introduction of appropriate measures, many threatened animal species can be granted long-term protection. “Species protection is our core mission,” says Knieriem. “That’s why one of our goals next year is to raise the funding for our conservation programme to €2 million – almost double the current amount. We are only able to make this commitment because of the millions of people who care about animals and the natural world who come to visit us every year.” A small additional “conservation fee” included in the price of every ticket has enabled Berlin’s zoos to get involved in numerous projects around the world that are helping some of the planet’s most seriously threatened animals and habitats. The Berlin World Wild conservation programme is supporting 35 projects in places as far flung as Tanzania and the Arctic.



Background to the award ceremony

Ideas from more than 570 schools were submitted to the Biodiversity Prize jury, who had the difficult task of choosing five winning projects. Zoo and Tierpark Berlin have awarded a total of €15,500 to the prize-winners so that they can implement their impressive ideas. The jury – consisting of TV presenter Willy Weitzel, mammal curator Dr Florian Sicks, entomologist Dr Melanie von Orlow of NABU Berlin, Zoo School Director Ulrike Barnett, and Zoo and Tierpark Species Protection Coordinator Katharina Sperling – selected the following winners:

1st place	Lina Morgenstern school (Kreuzberg)	“Climate-protecting super polar bears”
2nd place	Gerhardt Hauptmann grammar school (Friedrichshagen)	“Species conservation in our schoolyard”
3rd place	Charlie Chaplin school (Reinickendorf)	“Diverse school – diverse school garden”
4th place	Emmy Noether grammar school (Köpenick)	“Presentation of the reptile station”
5th place	Barnim grammar school (Falkenberg)	“Barnim for diversity – educational bee and plant trail”