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Press release

Back to nature: Awarding young talent

Zoo and Tierpark Berlin present Biodiversity Prize to four Berlin schools

Zoo and Tierpark Berlin have awarded their “Back to Nature!” Biodiversity Prize for the second time, recognising the work and ideas of young conservationists. The prizes, endowed with a total of €15,000, were awarded to four Berlin schools at a ceremony held on the Tierpark School’s nature trail by the award’s patron, Federal Environment Minister Steffi Lemke, and Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. The Biodiversity Prize not only serves as recognition for the environmentally conscious youngsters, it also enables the pupils to independently implement their urban nature projects. A particularly committed primary school in Berlin’s Hohenschönhausen district was awarded first place.

Urban nature plays an important role in biological diversity. Compared to their often intensively cultivated surroundings, cities can provide many different habitats in a small area and thus accommodate a surprisingly wide variety of species. The city of Berlin is no exception – it is home to more than 20,000 animal and plant species. “The Tierpark is one of the most important natural areas in the city,” says Dr Knieriem. “The 160-hectare park is not only a place where young people can learn more about complex interrelationships in nature, it is also an important habitat for native species.” He goes on to explain that, in addition to providing a home to various bird and insect species, the areas of the Tierpark away from public pathways are an important habitat for the endangered European green toad – which is found almost nowhere else in Berlin.

Keeping the city chirping, croaking and buzzing

The more than 400 schoolchildren who submitted entries for the Biodiversity Prize have already understood the importance of biodiversity. From insect havens to amphibian retreats, bird nesting sites and more, the youngsters came up with their own ideas for fostering a species-rich Berlin. “More and more people are becoming aware that we need to change course if we are to preserve the natural basis of life,” said Minister Lemke, addressing the almost 100 schoolchildren present. “I thank you for your incredible level of commitment. You are all young heroes who can serve as an example to many other young people – and adults too.” Involving children and teens in conservation efforts ensures that their ideas and visions are heard and enables them to help shape a more sustainable future. The jury was particularly impressed with the ideas presented by the Feldmark school in Berlin’s Hohenschönhausen district for the redesign of its schoolyard, which focused on the preservation and restoration of habitats. With the prize money, the Feldmark pupils intend to



set up bee boxes and create habitats for other native insects. Plans are also in place to install a small pond for amphibians and a nature discovery trail.

A new #GenerationRestoration

Around 1 million species could become extinct within the next few decades – primarily as a result of habitat destruction, pollution, and overexploitation of ecosystems. That will have a direct impact on life on Earth, because a healthy natural world not only has a positive effect on personal wellbeing, it also ensures clean air and water, regulates the climate, and provides an abundance of food and other resources.

The future effects of climate change and biodiversity loss will be most keenly felt by today's young people. It is therefore important to involve them in this topic and raise awareness of these issues early on – and, of course, to foster existing interest and commitment. With its Decade on Ecosystem Restoration from 2021 to 2030, the UN has called for increased efforts to revitalise essential ecosystems. As official actors with the UN Decade, Zoo and Tierpark Berlin want to motivate young people in particular to help protect and restore natural habitats. To learn more about the UN Decade, visit www.decadeonrestoration.org.

Zoo and Tierpark Berlin's ongoing commitment to the protection of endangered species and the preservation of biodiversity is demonstrated in their €2 million conservation programme, Berlin World Wild. The "Back to Nature!" Biodiversity Prize constitutes another step towards raising awareness among the general public and contributing to improved biodiversity. Zoo and Tierpark Berlin are gradually expanding their efforts to protect species in their natural habitats, for example with their reintroduction project for the European hamster in Germany.

This year's Biodiversity Prize winners are:

Place	Name of school	Project name
1st	Feldmark school	"Protecting bees and more"
2nd	Heinrich Schliemann grammar school	"People and the environment – biodiversity experienced"
3rd	Fläming primary school	"Teeming with life!"
4th	Friedrichsfelder school	"Garden power!"