

Plantlife projects working with BBS get new audiences into bryology

April Windle reports on two new Plantlife projects

Plantlife is working with BBS to enthuse new audiences about bryology and train future recorders, as part of two new projects in the Lake District and SW England. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the projects are targeted at conserving the bryophytes and lichens ('lower plants') of Atlantic woodland — one of the richest and most treasured habitats found in Britain. These cool-temperate rainforests are geographically restricted to the western seaboard of Britain, with remnants found in SW and NW England, North Wales and the Western Highlands of Scotland. Their bryophyte richness is known to rival that of the cloud forests of the Andes. However, they face a number of threats as a result of changes in land management, climate change and tree disease. In addition, fewer people are learning the specialist identification skills required to monitor them. These two projects seek to address some of these

issues, and support the conservation of Atlantic woodland lower plants.

Looking Out for the Small Things (LOST) is a two-year project in the Lake District. The project got underway earlier this year and is already engaging new audiences in learning about lower plants and contributing to their conservation through citizen science. One aspect of the project is 'New Generation Botanists'—a programme that will train 15 aspiring bryologists in basic bryophyte identification. Training will be delivered by Martin Godfrey of BBS, with follow-up survey days supported by Diane Dobson of OpenSpace. The training will equip people with the knowledge and skill-set required for getting started with bryophyte identification, allowing them to contribute their skills to biological recording. In addition to this, the trainees will learn how to effectively pass their new-found knowledge to others, providing walks

and public engagement events across the Lake District and wider Cumbria.

In the South West, Plantlife has developed an ambitious three-year project called *Building Resilience in South West Woodlands*. The project funding application is currently under consideration, and follows a successful two-year project, called 'Make the Small Things Count', which raised the profile of lower plants on Dartmoor and Exmoor. If funding is successful, this new project will carry out practical conservation targeted at improving conditions for lower plants at some of the most important Atlantic woodland sites in the country. Volunteers



will be involved in monitoring the outcomes of conservation work and surveying woodlands across the wider region. New Generation Botanist training will be delivered in Cornwall and Devon, working closely with the Cornwall and Devon Bryophyte Groups. Around 24 new bryologists will complete a 12-month training programme, providing them with a solid skills base for becoming future recorders. Community lab spaces will be set up to ensure trainees have access to microscopes and reference collections. The aim of both projects is to provide a lasting legacy by encouraging trainees to join the BBS and their local bryophyte recording groups. In addition, there will be training for local land managers in how to manage woodland for lower plants, and training and resources provided to schools, educators and rangers so they can continue to engage new audiences with lower plants for years to come.

For further information regarding these projects, please contact:

Lake District: April Windle (LOST Senior Project Officer) April.Windle@plantlife.org.uk

South West: Alison Smith (Lead Community Scientist) Alison.Smith@plantlife.org.uk

April Windle

e April.Windle@plantlife.org.uk