

## RZSS Celebrates World Wetlands at Edinburgh Zoo

**The ad from our events brochure** - What are wetlands? Where are the world's wetlands? Why do they have their own day? Find the answers to these questions and more while following a trail around the zoo visiting many of our wetland animals.

Other activities on the day included 4 mini talks on some of the wetland projects that RZSS (Royal Zoological Society of Scotland) is involved in. Summaries of the talks are listed below.

We also offered some wetland games and crafts, including origami frogs, turtle crafts, newts and crosses and a leap frog board game.

### *World wetland projects that RZSS is involved in:*

#### **Using a New Tool to Promote Conservation Strategies in the Brazilian Pantanal**

**Speaker – Sarah Robinson (RZSS Conservation and Research Officer)**

##### **The Site**

- Pantanal is one of the largest continuous wetlands on the planet. (140,000km<sup>2</sup>)
- Home to 124 species of mammal, 463 species of birds, 41 amphibians, 117 reptiles and more than 260 species of fish.
- It is a “Wetland of International Importance” in the Ramsar convention

##### **The Issues**

- Cattle ranching is the main income in the Pantanal and is a highly competitive business thus ranchers are intensifying ranching practices.
- Over 40% of the natural habitat in the area has been altered for ranching through the introduction of exotic grasses. These exotic grasses are not adapted to the extreme weather years of drought and floods of the area, thus starvation of cattle and wildlife could occur.
- Burning to promote new grass growth occurs, which frequently results in uncontrolled fires.

##### **Project Aims**

- To use the new tool which allows quicker analysis of the diet of the plant eating animals in the area to better understand their plant preferences.
- Note: The new tool is an illustrated interactive key which helps to quickly classify plant species cells that are found in the animals' faeces.
- This information will help ranchers undertake a more sustainable management regime for their ranches and the wildlife.

## **Grey Headed Fish Eagles and Water Snakes in Tonle Sap Lake, Cambodia**

**Speaker – Gareth Bennett (RZSS Senior Reptile Keeper)**

### **The Animals**

- The grey headed fish eagle is a large bird of prey that breeds in southern Asia and India. These eagles use water snakes as a food source.
- The number of species of water snakes and their ecology is still unknown.

### **The Issues**

- There has been massive over-harvesting of the water snakes in the area, as they are a cheap food source for crocodile farms.
- Unknown status of the grey headed fish eagles.
- Insufficient knowledge of snake populations.

### **Project Aims**

- Take a survey of the number of breeding pairs of eagles in the area.
- Identify the species of snakes that are resident to the area, also to research the snakes' behaviour and ecology.

## **EAZA Campaign 2008 – Year of the Frog**

**(Bonus talk introducing the new EAZA campaign for the year)**

**Speaker – Gareth Bennett (RZSS Senior Reptile Keeper)**

### **The Animals**

- Amphibians (Frogs, toads, salamanders and newts) play an important role in wetland food webs as predators and prey.
- They eat many pest insects so play a role in benefiting agriculture and also decreasing the spread of some diseases such as malaria.

### **The Issues**

- Habitat loss, climate change, pollution and pesticides, introduced species, and over collection for food and pets.
- The largest threat at the moment is a fungus called chytrid.
- Chytrid is a disease that has spread from Africa across the planet and is now killing dozens of frog species.

### **Project Aims**

- The creation and of the Amphibian Conservation Action Plan (ACAP), which focuses on research, assessment and conservation in nature.
- Create Amphibian Ark which is a highly managed captive management strategy.
- Increase global awareness of the plight of amphibians.

## *Scottish wetland projects that RZSS are involved in:*

### **Beaver Reintroduction**

**Speaker – Alaina Macri (RZSS Education Officer)**

#### **The Animals**

- The European beaver is an aquatic mammal that has been extinct in Scotland since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- Beavers play an important role in supporting wetland ecosystems.

#### **The Issues**

- These animals were hunted to extinction for their fur, meat and castoreum oil.
- SWT and RZSS are appealing to the Scottish Government to reintroduce this animal.

#### **Project Aim**

- To reintroduce about a dozen European beavers from Norway to Knapdale Woods in Mid- Argyll.
- The Scottish Beaver Trial will take approximately 3 years to complete.

### **Salmon for Schools**

**Speaker – Polly Phillpot (RZSS Senior Education Officer)**

#### **The Animals**

- Atlantic Salmon, is an anadromous migratory fish found in the temperate and arctic regions of the Northern Hemisphere. We are specifically working with fertilised Atlantic salmon eggs.
- The eggs come from the River Earn Improvement Association (REIA)

#### **The Issues**

- There are many issues facing the native salmon stocks including pollution, migration obstacles, over fishing of salmon food sources at sea, and climatic changes.

#### **Project Aims**

- To teach pupils about lifecycles & caring for animals and to stimulate their interest in local wildlife. This is done through the incubating of salmon eggs in the classroom, hatching out the alevin and releasing them back to their natal river in the wild.
- REIA aims to promote a natural self sustaining salmonid population.

## *The Edinburgh Zoo animals that made the wetlands trail were:*

Chilean Flamingos

Bamboo Lemurs (Alaotran Gentle Lemur)

Red river hogs

Oriental small clawed otters

European Mallards

Pygmy hippo

Axolotl

Black Stork

There were also many information boards around the zoo answering the questions, what are wetlands? Where are the world's wetlands? Why do they have their own day?

Below are some pictures from the activities on the day.



A member of the public playing our leap frog board game.



Origami frogs



Colouring the Ramsar turtle crafts

If you have any questions about our World Wetland's Day events please feel free to contact Alaina Macri [amacri@rzss.org.uk](mailto:amacri@rzss.org.uk)