

# Schoolchildren help local river life thanks to National Lottery players

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Getting to grips with the wildlife in Ballinderry River

A classroom project to restore the Ballinderry River is reconnecting young people with Northern Ireland's glorious natural heritage.

The river, which flows from the Sperrin Mountains to Lough Neagh, is known for its trout and unique population of endangered freshwater pearl mussels.

Children at St Mary's Primary School in Dunamore County Tyrone reared trout from eggs provided by Frank Mitchell from the hatchery at the Ballinderry River Trust, which runs the HLF-supported project. Frank has returned to help the children release the young fish into the river, which flows around 100 yards from their school.

Restoring the trout will help the river's freshwater pearl mussels, which are facing extinction. The mussels' larvae live within the gills of young trout – cultivating the trout population therefore boosts these fragile creatures, as well as helping the children engage with their natural environment.

[quote=Paul Mullan, Head of HLF Northern Ireland]"An entire community and a precious landscape are all being transformed thanks to National Lottery players."[/quote]

Paul Mullan, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, said: “This is a truly exciting and innovative project. It’s early days yet, but all the signs are positive that one day, perhaps when these children are themselves tending the land, there will be a healthy population of mussels and trout in the Ballinderry River once more.

“An entire community and a precious landscape are all being transformed thanks to National Lottery players.”

“It’s been great,” added 10-year-old Daniel Hargney. “It’s so educational and I’ve learned so much about the Ballinderry River.”

The Ballinderry River Freshwater Pearl Mussel Rescue Project is one in a long list of HLF-supported natural heritage projects in Northern Ireland. Lough Neagh this year received a £2.49million HLF grant to restore its precious wetlands as well as helping the local community to get involved. National Lottery money has also helped fund a visitor centre at the iconic Giant’s Causeway and revive the 400-year-old gardens of Antrim Castle for local people to enjoy.

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