

Zoo goes wild about top environmental students

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland's worldwide reputation for conservation will be highlighted when it hosts Scotland's environmental student awards next month at Edinburgh Zoo.

The Environmental Placement Programme (EPP) awards will be sponsored by VisitScotland and handed over by First Minister Alex Salmond on Thursday 10 September in the lecture theatre which forms part of the Budongo Trail complex, the organisers announced.

Opened in May 2008, the £5.65 million Budongo Trail is a specialised enclosure with three state-of-the-art 'living pods' which can house up to 40 chimpanzees. It is a major centre for chimpanzee behavioural research.

The EPP is an annual Scotland-wide project in which university students help companies improve their environmental practices. It is run by the Business Environment Partnership (BEP), the leading provider of free and subsidised assistance to small and medium-sized firms throughout Scotland. The EPP is sponsored by the Scottish Government, Shell UK Limited and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

This Summer BEP (www.thebep.org.uk), which has its headquarters in Midlothian, has matched some 50 students with companies keen to cut their fuel and water bills and make other cost savings associated with improved environmental management. At the end of their eight weeks placements, the students submit reports on their projects. Awards are given to those judged to have completed the most innovative and practical work.

BEP Executive Director Gregor Murray said the spectacular Zoo venue was the perfect location for the Awards' presentation. "It will provide a stunning climax to this year's Programme. Edinburgh Zoo has seen first hand the benefits of taking on a student to improve its waste management and is aware of the significant impacts students can make with their fresh knowledge, perspective and enthusiasm," he commented.

David Windmill, Chief Executive of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, said: “We are looking forward to welcoming the First Minister to Edinburgh Zoo and proud to be part of this event. As one of Scotland’s leading conservation charities, environmental awareness is at the core of what we do. Over the last couple of years we have been assessing our environmental impact and investing resources into creating a greener Zoo. We have already made significant improvements and will continue to investigate the ways we can reduce our impact on the environment.”

Beth Hutchison, Planning and Sustainability Manager, VisitScotland added: “VisitScotland is delighted to be supporting BEP’s Environmental Placement Programme. As an organisation we are committed to sustainability and ensuring it is part of the ethos of the economic planning and practices of the tourism industry from environmental concerns to economic and social development. I look forward with interest to seeing the innovative and practical solutions that the students have developed and what this has brought in terms of sustainability to the companies involved.”

ENDS

Media queries to Scot PR. Tel. 0131-473 2388 or 07867-510451.