

Countryside

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NEWSLETTER

Spring 2009

IBERS ABERYSTWYTH
Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences

Top scores for degree courses at IBERS

The National Student Survey (NSS) is a poll of recent graduates conducted across the UK that seeks to gauge satisfaction with a range of attributes such as teaching, assessment, support and feedback.

Aberystwyth University has always enjoyed high ratings for student satisfaction in the NSS, and the 2008 results are better than ever. Countryside degree courses run at IBERS achieved the top scores for the whole of the UK. The IBERS Biology degree had the highest overall score of any Welsh university and equalled the scores of Oxford, Edinburgh, Bristol and Imperial College.



Sampling the mega-slide – all in the name of science, of course.

The New Face of Farming

As part of their module 'Countryside Management in Practice', third-year students on BSc Countryside courses visited two farms which have diversified into tourism in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

At Aberyddnant Farm near Crai, the owner has converted some of the farm outbuildings into superb holiday cottages. Aberyddnant Farm offers guests the opportunity to experience life on an organic farm and guests are encouraged to help feed the livestock and collect eggs from the flock of free-range hens.

At Cantref Adventure Farm, the owners have developed a family-orientated visitor attraction alongside their conventional farming business and riding school. The adventure farm offers visitors a chance to take part in farm activities, such as feeding the lambs or taking a tractor-and-trailer ride, or to try something a bit different, such as riding on the 'mega-sledge ride' or being a spectator at the pig races. The farm also offers bunkhouse-style accommodation.

List of Courses

BSc

Countryside Conservation
Countryside Management
Countryside Recreation and Tourism
Sustainable Rural Development

Foundation Degree

Countryside Conservation
Countryside Management
Countryside Recreation and Tourism

Higher National Diploma

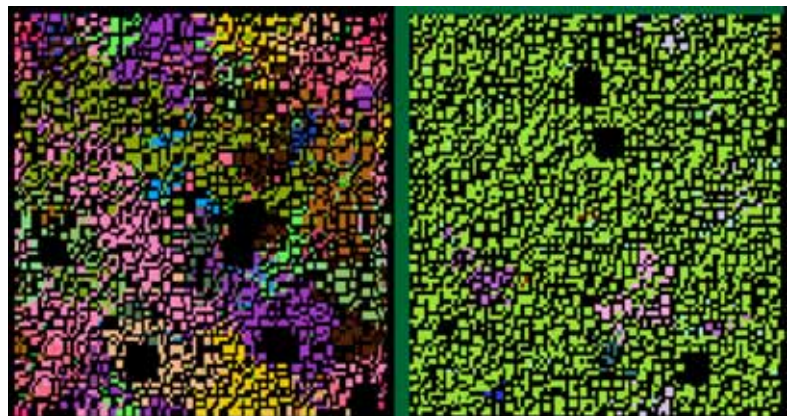
Countryside Conservation
Countryside Management
Countryside Recreation and Tourism

Interested?

Phone **Fay Hollick** on **01970 624471**

Virtual Grasslands Solve Ecological Puzzle

Research soon to be published in the Journal of Theoretical Ecology has answered a question that has puzzled ecologists for years. Using a computer model to simulate virtual grasslands, IBERS staff believe they have discovered why the most agriculturally productive grasslands are low in botanical diversity even though in theory, species-rich meadows should produce more biomass. The answer suggests that in the future it should be possible to create new agricultural systems that not only produce more food, but also support more diversity.



Computer simulation of a diverse and a low diversity productive grassland

Students demonstrate their dry stone walling skills in the Hafod Estate

Students on HND and Foundation Degree countryside courses recently helped reconstruct a dilapidated dry-stone wall on the historic Hafod Estate.

The work was carried out for ex-student Paul Dann, now Hafod Trust warden for the Forestry Commission Estate. A substantial length of wall was built but there is still plenty left to do for future students. This work was completed as part of the practical estate skills module that develops a range of countryside skills such as hedging, fencing and tree planting.



The wall during construction.

Well done Jon!

First year student Jon McCalmont, who is studying for a Foundation Degree in Countryside Management, won a Farmers' Union of Wales award of £700 for an essay he submitted on 'The future of Welsh farming'. Jon, of Llangammarch Wells, Powys, received his award from FUW president Gareth Vaughan at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair.

What has philosophy to do with water voles?



A water vole

In 1985 Michael Soulé published a research paper that claimed conservation was a 'crisis discipline' that needed to draw on a range of fields of study to be successful.

Since then, there has been a burgeoning interest in the human, social, psychological, political, and institutional issues that affect the success of conservation. Combining social sciences with what has traditionally been a science-based subject does, however, create difficulties, such as the need to reconcile philosophical differences between areas of study. To aid integration, Dr Ioan Fazey, with other researchers at Aberdeen University (Anna Eveley, Xavier Lambin, and Michelle Pinard) have written a paper (in press, *Ecology and Society*) that explains how taking different philosophical approaches affects the outcomes of research. They use a case study of understanding the motivations of volunteers used to trap American Mink in order to conserve water voles. This highlights the importance of clarity about a researcher's philosophical assumptions when working on interdisciplinary projects.

Vulnerability and Environmental Change

Over the summer Dr Ioan Fazey spent a month working with former colleagues at the Australian National University trying to get their heads around the complexities of adapting to rapid environmental change. While humans have in the past responded to cope with environmental change, many adaptive responses have exacerbated initial problems or created new ones. With other IBERS researchers (Mike Christie and Javier Gamarra) and contributions from Leeds (Lindsay Stringer) and Aberdeen universities (Mark Reed), the team came up with three prerequisites for developing more effective adaptation strategies that reduce vulnerability to future unforeseen change. These include the need to (1) remove ultimate drivers of environmental change; (2) maintain a diversity of future response options; and (3) nurture human capacities to enable uptake of the response options. It is intended that these principles will be applied to rural community development and resource management in the Solomon Islands.

Conference paper

Staff member Ian Keirle recently attended an international conference in Tuscany, Italy, on the Management and Monitoring of Visitor Flows. He gave a paper on the use of the importance-performance technique as a means of establishing visitor satisfaction with a range of countryside issues, based on a study he completed on management issues associated with access to the countryside of Ceredigion.

IBERS raises money for Children in Need

Staff and students from IBERS once again clashed in the yearly football match held in the indoor equine arena to raise money for Children in Need. Players were handicapped by wearing Wellington boots and by having their legs tied together if they scored.

The students won the 'Welly Cup' for the second year in a row, a triumph of youth over age! Institute Director, Professor Wayne Powell, who played and scored in the match commented, "This was great fun and shows the close working relationship between staff and students. The University is proud to support such a worthy cause as Children in Need". A total of £125 has so far been raised.

