

## **Involving the young**

I recently listened to a talk by Steve Greenwood, producer of last summer's BBC series *Lost Land of the Jaguar*, shot in Guyana, and a previous series called *Expedition Borneo*. The format of the two series is the same: choose an area of virgin rain-forest, drop into it a team of naturalists, and get them to find as many interesting species as they can in the few weeks they are there.

Greenwood's explicit objective is to show the threat to the rain-forests from logging and intensive agriculture, and to pressure governments to protect them (the more species they find, the more of a case there is for protection). However, his broader objective is to generate interest in conservation among children and young people, who (the BBC's research says) know nothing about nature and have no interest in conservation. So he uses dramatic action and camera angles, loud music, and "oh my god!" commentary to draw in his young audience and keep them interested – all very different from the David Attenborough style of measured explanation loved by an older age group.

We have found the same lack of knowledge about nature among children and young people in the Friends education work. Over the last year one of our members and her 12-year-old daughter have developed a nature table that we now take around local schools. It has photographs and specimens of fauna and flora in Richmond Park, including bird feathers, grasses, beetles, a mouse skull and even a snake skin and skeleton. We have been amazed at the reception

the nature table receives, not just from children, who have often never seen such things in real life before, but also from teachers, who say that they do not know enough to teach their pupils about nature and avoid bringing up the subject because they can't answer their pupils' questions. One girl said that the only time she had been to Richmond Park with her school, or even had it mentioned, was a trip to count cars as part of her geography project!

The primary objectives of the Friends include to "encourage the preservation of Richmond Park and the protection of trees, plant, bird and animal life". Unlike the rain-forest in Guyana or Borneo, Richmond Park is already protected as a National Nature Reserve, so that battle is already won. But we will not be successful in conserving the Park in the long term unless people, and particularly young people, understand the value of conserving it. Given the lack of basic knowledge about nature that exists today, this is a more difficult battle, but one which we are starting to tackle. If you'd like to help in the Friends education programme, please contact me.



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