Tree-mendous effort for endangered Cumbria species

Volunteers have branched out to help protect one of Cumbria’s most endangered species.

An army of helpers descended on the banks of Emesdale’s River Ehen to plant 550 trees in a bid to safeguard the future of an important colony of freshwater mussels.

Experts say the growing tree roots will help bind and stabilise the riverbank preventing silt and other pollutants entering the mussels’ water living space.

“The River Ehen catchment supports the largest viable population of freshwater pearl mussels left in England but they are under serious threat of extinction and urgent action is required to prevent this happening,” said Shane O’Leary, Projects’ Officer for West Cumbria Rivers Trust.

“Planting trees is one of the practical ways to aid their survival. This fascinating species is one of the longest-lived invertebrates known, living for well over 100 years and are essential to the functioning of a healthy river.”

The 550 native saplings – including species like silver birch, alder, willow and oak – were provided by the Woodland Trust and were planted along the riverbank at Emesdale Scout Camp.

Volunteers from the Scout Camp, West Cumbria Rivers Trust, Environment Agency, and Wild Emesdale all took part.
Mike Farrell of the Environment Agency said the project was a great example of partnership working making a positive difference.

“This new woodland strip will not only benefit the Scout Camp by securing the site boundary but also provides habitat and food for many animals and helps to bind the riverbank together. A stable riverbank will reduce excess silt input from eroding banks and can also trap potential pollution from entering the river, both of which are detrimental to the mussels,” he said.

The tree-planting is one of many projects carried out by the Pears in Pilton (PIP) Project, a UK wide project to safeguard the future of the freshwater pearl mussel in Scotland, England and Wales. PIP is funded in part through the European Commission along with 22 organisations across the UK. West Cumbria Rivers Trust is responsible for delivering the project in England as well as its partner the Environment Agency.

For information about the project or to find out how to get involved contact Diane on 017687 44347 or visit www.westcumbriariverstrust.org. Keep in touch with their progress on Twitter by following @mothermussel. Check out www.utilisemerdale.co.uk for other activities in Ennerdale.