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RENEW X BookTrust: The Biodiversity Storytelling Summit 2023

The very first Biodiversity Storytelling Summit took place at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew on Thursday 19 October. This extraordinary event brought scientists, authors, illustrators and publishers together with a shared mission - to explore the representation of biodiversity in children's literature and harness the magic of reading to improve access to the natural world.

A collaborative initiative between RENEW a five-year partnership programme focused on biodiversity renewal, and BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity - the initiative's primary objective is to encourage biodiversity renewal by influencing the next generation of thinkers through books and stories.

The summit featured an inspiring keynote address from Nicola Davies, renowned author, scientist, environmental campaigner, zoologist and award winner whose catalogue of over 80 children's books has been published in 10 languages. During the day there were workshop sessions, engaging presentations, a steady exchange of ideas and exciting new connections made.

Annie Crombie, Deputy Chief Executive at BookTrust said:

"From our work and research, we know that in addition to improving wellbeing, educational attainment and significantly improving life chances - particularly for children from low-income families, regular reading has the power to create lasting impressions and inspire change.

By combining the storytelling talents of authors and illustrators, the knowledge and enthusiasm of scientists, with our expertise in how to get children reading, we hope to inspire a new generation of young readers with a deep appreciation for the natural world.

The brilliant Biodiversity Storytelling Summit was an exciting step toward making nature more accessible to all children, using books and stories as a catalyst to create measurable biodiversity renewal on the ground. We're excited to see where this collaboration leads."

John Wedgwood Clarke, Associate Professor (E&R) in Creative Writing at University of Exeter added:

"It's so important that the books children have about nature open a sense of wonder, not only about global nature - the animals of the zoo - about what is actually around them, on their doorsteps, wherever they may live.

For instance, there are some extraordinary plants and insects on streets that are mind-blowingly strange and different. The scruffy and overlooked places can be the most exciting in terms of biodiversity. By bringing ecologists, writers and illustrators and publishers together for our summit we showed that we're only touching the surface of the storytelling potential of everyday nature around us. Now more than ever we need to give children hope about their future and connect the next generation with the nature that sustains us all."

This remarkable collaboration between RENEW and BookTrust involves several approaches, including the curation of biodiversity-inspired content into an accessible library, and engaging authors and illustrators to create new biodiversity-inspired content.

The Biodiversity Storytelling Summit 2023 signifies a crucial step towards developing a deeper connection between children's literature and the natural world, with the ultimate goal of creating a more biodiverse and accessible literary landscape for all young readers.

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CONTACT

Images are [available to download here](#) and for further information, please contact:
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BookTrust - press@booktrust.org.uk

NOTES TO EDITORS

About BookTrust

We are the UK's largest children's reading charity. We get millions of children reading, especially those from low-income families or vulnerable backgrounds. We do this because research shows that children who read regularly are happier and healthier. They form stronger bonds and relationships. They do better at school, are more creative and enjoy more success in life. This is why we work with families, supporting them to start sharing stories and books together from the earliest possible age.

Some of our key activities include:

- BookStart programmes for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers which provides families with books and resources to help foster a love of shared reading from the earliest age.
- Our writer-in-residence programme which gives a platform to some of the best children's writers and illustrators in the country to champion the power of books. Past writers in residence include Michael Rosen, Nick Sharratt, Onjali Q. Raúf and Dapo Adeola.
- Supporting the work of the Children's Laureate (currently Jospeh Coelho). Former Laureates include Jacqueline Wilson, Malorie Blackman, Anthony Browne and Quentin Blake.

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About RENEW

RENEW is a five-year partnership programme to develop solutions to one of the major environmental challenges for humankind: the renewal of biodiversity.

We are in a biodiversity crisis. A million species of plants and animals are threatened with global extinction, and wildlife populations across much of the planet have been dramatically reduced. This is of profound concern because biodiversity underpins human existence. RENEW is working, with a sense of urgency, to reshape understanding and action on biodiversity renewal across scales, creating knowledge, and influencing national institutions, communities and individuals. Our focus is on a 'people-in-nature' approach, reflecting the two-way, dynamic relations between people and nature and the need to develop a relational approach to renew our life-support systems.

Funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the programme is a collaboration between the University of Exeter and the National Trust and has been co-designed and developed with over 30 partners from a diverse range of sectors.

RENEW is led by Professors Krasimira Tsaneva-Atanasova, Kevin Gaston, and Catriona McKinnon from the University of Exeter, and Professor Rosie Hails from the National Trust.

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