



*Harnessing the social and natural sciences for sustainable rural development*

## RELU NEWS

**Issued January 2007**

<http://www.relu.ac.uk/>

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### 1 **New wave of RELU research to inform strategies for managing animal and plant diseases**

Ten new RELU projects have been successful in obtaining £7 million of funding. Six of the projects bring together teams of natural and social scientists to research the management of animal and plant diseases in the UK. They aim to find strategies for preventing and dealing with these problems and are considering a wide range of issues involved in outbreaks, including the effect of changes in the countryside, technological developments, increasing globalisation, and the part played by public perceptions and concerns. Details of all the new RELU projects are available at [www.relu.ac.uk/research](http://www.relu.ac.uk/research).

## **2 Interdisciplinary fellowships open up new career opportunities for young academics**

A new research fellowship scheme is helping to fill the gap in career opportunities for young academics interested in working across disciplines. Three such fellowships have just been awarded to researchers on RELU-related topics, covering research into vegetation and climate changes in upland areas and how knowledge about these might influence how people appreciate such landscapes today; a historical perspective on animal disease prevention and how such evidence might inform future policy; and the effects of climate change on food production. For more information see <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/ID%20Fellowships.htm>.

## **3 Making knowledge transfer a reality**

RELU researchers have taken part in a novel initiative which has allowed them to work alongside staff inside commercial organisations, voluntary bodies and public agencies. The scheme encourages knowledge exchange between researchers and the people and organisations that can benefit from their research. Locations for placements have ranged from pubs, fish farms and horticultural consultants through to bodies such as the Environment Agency, Defra, the Food Standards Agency and the Pesticides Safety Directorate. The scheme has been so successful during 2006, that it has been extended into 2007 to enable outside practitioners to visit research teams and explore the implications of the research for their own work. For further details see <http://www.relu.ac.uk/about/previousworkshadows.htm>.

## **4 Researchers say UK leads Europe in biopesticides regulation**

The Pesticides Safety Directorate is becoming a regulatory innovator on the registration of biopesticides in the EU, argued speakers at a conference on 'Biopesticides: The Way Ahead' held at the Royal Agricultural Society of England on 18 October 2006. The establishment of the Biopesticides Scheme is a real breakthrough in enabling more products to be registered as an alternative to chemical pesticides. Papers and press reports for this conference, organised by a RELU team at Warwick University, are available at: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/biopesticides/events/>  
<http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/Grant.htm>

## **5 Landscapes that benefit wildlife may also be good for farmers' profits**

Henry Buller, project leader of the RELU Eating Biodiversity research project, has been advising farmers how a diverse landscape that benefits plants and wildlife might also help them to increase their profits. Professor Buller was speaking at the annual conference of the Farmers' Retail and Marketing Association (FARMA) in Torquay, where he described how the project is examining evidence of improved quality of meat, when animals graze on natural grasslands. See <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/Buller.htm>.

## **6 Can angling sustain the river environment?**

Results from a new RELU project will be used to influence practice and decision making for the integrated management of the river environment. We know that nearly four million anglers spend an estimated £6 billion on their sport every year in the UK. While angling makes an increasingly important contribution to the sustainability of the rural economy, it is also important to sustain the river environment on which the sport itself, and so much else, depends. This project focuses on three rivers in the north of England: the Esk, the Ure and the Swale, whose catchments are under various environmental pressures, and explores the complex linkages between river, fishing, biodiversity and institutions of governance. See <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Oughton.htm>

## **7 Better management of floodplains**

Flooding has become a hot topic in both town and country over recent years. The government used to provide support for farmers to maintain agricultural flood defence schemes in coastal and floodplain areas. However, concerns about the environment and the effects of flooding on individuals and businesses other than farming, have prompted a re-appraisal of land management options and policies. New RELU research is exploring the changes that have occurred over the last 40 years in areas which were 'defended' under flood defence schemes, and will help inform decisions about the future management of floodplains. See <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Morris.htm>

## **8 Improving the success of agri-environment schemes**

Over thousands of years, traditional farming in Europe produced landscapes which supported a rich variety of plants and animals. However, technological intensification in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century led to huge declines in wildlife. Attempts are now being made to combat this with a range of agri-environment schemes but

until now these schemes have had limited effects. Reasons for this probably include less than optimal management by landowners, difficulties experienced by plants and animals in colonising new habitats because they are already so rare, and their movement being blocked by physical obstacles in the landscape. Researchers within a major new RELU research project are examining these issues, and the effects of training on farmers, with the aim of improving the success of such agri-environment schemes.

See <http://www.relu.ac.uk/research/projects/SecondCall/Bullock.htm>

## **9 RELU people**

### **a) RELU political scientist advises EU on biocontrol agents**

Professor Wyn Grant, project coordinator on RELU's research project looking at the role of regulation in developing biological alternatives to pesticides, has been appointed to the steering group of the REBECA (Regulation of Biological Control Agents) EU policy action. REBECA is reviewing possible risks of biocontrol agents and comparing regulation in the EU and the USA. It will propose alternative regulation procedures that maintain the same level of safety for human health and the environment but which accelerate market access and lower registration costs. See <http://www.rebeca-net.de/>.

### **b) RELU appoints science communications manager**

Anne Liddon has been appointed as the RELU science communications manager. Formerly head of communications with Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust, Anne has expertise in media planning and strategy and is an experienced communicator, having published articles in health and archaeological journals and had short stories broadcast by the BBC, as well as working with the local, national and specialist media to achieve news coverage. She is also experienced in mounting various public, stakeholder and practitioner events. You can contact Anne at RELU tel 0191 222 6880 or email [anne.liddon@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:anne.liddon@ncl.ac.uk).