

Relu news



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1 Interdisciplinary experiences given a positive vote by research councils

Relu Director Philip Lowe, Assistant Director Jeremy Phillipson and Science Communications Manager Anne Liddon met with the heads of ESRC, BBSRC and NERC to feed back some of the experiences of interdisciplinary working and stakeholder engagement from the programme. Senior social and natural scientists were there to give their impressions of working on Relu projects and Sir Howard Newby from the Strategic Advisory Committee was in the chair. It was a positive meeting with useful contributions from around the table and overwhelmingly enthusiastic responses about the Relu experience.

2 Should farmers be trained to implement agri environment schemes?

Are agri-environment initiatives as successful as they could be? Their effectiveness has often been questioned, but Relu researchers find that some basic training for farmers could enhance outcomes significantly. Read about their findings in the latest [Relu Policy and Practice Note no 37](#).

3 Is prevention really better than cure for livestock diseases?

Politicians, farmers and vets would all say they aim to prevent livestock disease so why are a whole host of such problems still so common? Research carried out by [Relu Interdisciplinary Fellow Abigail Woods](#) shows that prevention will only be implemented in preference to cure when veterinary, farming and political wills coincide, and economic conditions are also favourable. She examines how attitudes towards disease prevention have moved in different directions from the 1950s to recent times, often thwarting the ideal of “prevention rather than cure” and how, during the 1960s, a preventative approach seemed within our grasp, only to be undermined by the economic downturn. The research is published in [Social History of Medicine](#).

4 Unhelpful attitudes to badgers rooted in history

Research by [Relu interdisciplinary fellow Angela Cassidy](#) shows that our conflicted attitudes to badgers go back well before Kenneth Grahame’s depiction of wise old Mr Badger in *The Wind in the Willows*, and certainly predate arguments about their possible role in spreading bovine tuberculosis among cattle. She argues that these ambivalent feelings are still colouring today’s debate over bovine tuberculosis and influence how it is covered in the media. The research is published in [Sociologia Ruralis](#).

5 Relu networks spark new disease research collaborations

Several new research projects are building on collaborations built between Relu researchers during the course of the programme. Mariella Marzano from Forest Research and Julie Barnett from Brunel University, team members from Relu’s [Assessing and Communicating Animal Disease Risk for Countryside Users](#) project are working with others on a Defra contract ‘Improved methods for early detection of Oak Processionary Moth’. Mariella is also working with Forest Research colleague and fellow Relu researcher, Norman Dandy, on a Defra project analysing stakeholders for tree health, led by Clive Potter of Imperial College. Clive led Relu’s project [Lessons from Dutch Elm disease in Assessing the Threat from Sudden Oak Death](#).

6 Land-based professions build learning network

Relu’s Assistant Director and LWEC Land Use Fellow Jeremy Phillipson has embarked on a one year project to establish an inter-professional learning network for the land-based professions: veterinarians, applied ecologists, land agents, agronomists etc. This draws upon findings from the Relu project [Science in the Field: Understanding the changing role of expertise in the rural economy](#). It is designed to stimulate exchange and learning between different professions and with the research community and test the demand and value for such a network. The project is funded through the ESRC’s Knowledge Exchange Follow on Fund. The project advisory group met for the first time in June and includes

representatives from the British Veterinary Association, the Institute of Ecological and Environmental Management, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Agricultural Industries Confederation. For further details contact Amy.Proctor@ncl.ac.uk.

7 Working together to improve lives across the globe

Director of the Ecosystems for Poverty Alleviation Programme ([ESPA](#)) Paul van Gardingen capped off a busy two months of globetrotting with attendance at the Rio+20 global summit last month. After [five weeks spent visiting ESPA funded projects](#) across the developing world, Paul arrived in Brazil to take part in several events including 'Improving Lives', a session jointly organised by ESPA, the UN's [Poverty Environment Initiative](#), and the World [Bank's Wealth Accounting and the Valuing of Ecosystem Services](#) partnership. The [event](#), which was also webcast live, gave the audience a chance to hear how sound ecosystem management can contribute to poverty reduction and inclusive, sustainable growth.

8 EU policy report draws on research evidence

The European Union Committee of the House of Lords' report '[An Indispensable Resource: EU Freshwater Policy](#)', (33rd Report of Session 2010-12, HL Paper 296) makes 15 references to evidence provided by Relu's [Catchment Management for Protection of Water Resources](#) team, and includes the project's 'Template for Catchment Management' as an appendix to the report.

9 BESS will improve our understanding of biodiversity

Scientists, land managers and policy practitioners from around 65 organisations came together for the launch of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service Sustainability ([BESS](#)) research programme in June. BESS is a Natural Environment Research Council programme being directed from the University of York and will continue until 2015. It aims to improve our scientific understanding of the role of biodiversity in key ecosystem processes while developing a thriving, interdisciplinary scientific community undertaking research related to biodiversity and ecosystem services. Key organisations which attended the launch, included Natural England, the RSPB and the Ecosystem Markets Task Force, who all talked about the importance of this initiative to their own work.

10 Environmental modelling opens doors to wide range of expertise

As stakeholder involvement and expertise becomes an accepted feature of environmental modelling, Relu researchers Tobias Kreuger and Laurence Smith, together with colleagues Trevor Page and Alexey Volnov, have been timely in editing a special issue of the leading journal in this field - Environmental Modelling and Software - on "[Expert Opinion in Environmental Modelling and Management](#)". Environmental modelling is no longer the preserve of a few "experts". This unprecedented special issue brings together interdisciplinary research from across Relu and the wider community, setting social science insights next to technical methodologies.

11 Transatlantic links lead to comparative analysis of rural areas

Researchers from Relu and beyond have contributed to a book comparing challenges facing rural areas in the UK and US just published by Routledge. "[Rural Transformations and Rural Policies in the US and UK](#)", authored by social scientists from both sides of the Atlantic, looks at aspects of rural policy, food systems, migration between rural and urban areas, issues around ageing populations and entrepreneurship in a wide-ranging series of studies. Relu Director Philip Lowe has contributed a key chapter on "The Agency of Rural Research in Comparative Context".

12 Taking a closer look at rural growth

Relu's Assistant Director Jeremy Phillipson gave a keynote address "Enabling Rural Economies: the challenge ahead" at a national policy conference:

[“Promotion of Rural Economic Growth”](#) in Birmingham. He explored the challenges rural economies are facing today and how the government’s Rural Economy Growth Review could assist them in overcoming these.

13 Peaty ideas feed into policy

Researchers from Relu’s [Sustainable Uplands: Learning to Manage Future Change](#) project are currently reviewing the latest research, including findings from Relu research and the [Valuing Nature Network](#), on Payment for Ecosystems Services (PES) and are supplying this to the Defra team who will be developing the PES action plan outlined in the government’s Natural Environment White Paper. They have been asked to submit their ideas for a peatland carbon code to Defra’s Ecosystem Markets Taskforce.

14 Ecosystems approach in the National Planning Policy Framework

The [Ecosystems Knowledge Network](#), a resource for those wanting to share knowledge or learn about the practical benefits of an ecosystems approach, is holding an event on 12th July in Barnstaple, Devon. This interactive one day event “Spatial planning and an ecosystems approach” will explore the implications of an ecosystems approach for spatial planning in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework. Alister Scott from Relu’s *Managing Environmental Change at the Rural Urban Fringe* project and Rob Fish who worked on two Relu projects, most recently [Assessment of Knowledge Sources in Animal Disease Control](#) will be among the speakers.

15 Playing the planning game

[Rufopoly](#) the game-based learning tool developed by Relu’s *Managing Environmental Change at the Rural Urban Fringe* project is proving popular with stakeholders. It has been used in a series of meetings and events since it was launched at the Relu conference in November, including Staffordshire County Council cabinet meeting, Royal Town Planning Institute AGM, TECHFEST at Birmingham City University and a seminar supported by Higher Education Innovation Funding for a range of participants from across England and Scotland.

16 Watery findings flow far and wide

Laurence Smith who leads Relu’s [Innovative Market-Based Mechanisms and Networks for Long Term Protection of Water Resources](#) project and his team have been taking findings from the research to a number of policy-related events, as well as visiting research partners in the US. Activities have included taking part in a [Catchment Change Network/Defra](#) workshop at Lancaster University and meetings with experts and county government planners from the Hudson River Estuary Programme, and the Watershed Commissioner for the Delaware County Action Plan.

17 Relu people:

- From September 2012, **Louise Heathwaite** who co-led Relu’s [Assessment of Knowledge Sources in Animal Disease Control](#) project will take up the role of Chief Scientific Adviser, Rural and Environment to the Scottish Government.
- **Andy Dobson** from Relu’s [Assessing and Communicating Animal Disease Risk for Countryside Users](#) project has moved from Oxford University to a post at the British Trust for Ornithology in Stirling where he will be developing new research projects, taking the lead on raptor issues and assisting in raising the profile of BTO science in Scotland.
- **Liz O'Brien** from Relu’s [Assessing and Communicating Animal Disease Risk for Countryside Users](#) project is currently seconded on a part time basis from Forest Research to Defra, joining their behavioural insights team.
- **Mark Reed** who led Relu’s [Sustainable Uplands](#) projects is co-leading a

work package of the follow-on to the [National Ecosystem Assessment](#), looking at the different ways in which ecosystems services are valued. This will draw on economic insights emerging from their [Valuing Nature Network](#) project and insights on deliberative/ participatory approaches from the Relu research.

- **Alistair Scott** who leads Relu's *Managing Environmental Change at the Rural Urban Fringe* project has been appointed a member of the National Ecosystem Assessment Expert Panel.
- **Julie Barnett** from Relu's [Assessing and Communicating Animal Disease Risks for Countryside Users](#) project has been awarded a chair and is now Professor in Healthcare Research at the Department of Information Systems and Computing, Brunel University.
- **Wyn Grant** from Relu's [Governance of Livestock Disease](#) project gave a presentation on 'Framing the Badger' at the Medicine and the Human Sciences symposium on 'The Human Animal: Investigating the Boundaries of Being Human' at Warwick University in May.

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