Conker Tree Science: a national citizen science experiment on parasitism in an invasive species

Funded by NERC Public Engagement

Conker Tree Science

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Seeking 10 ambassadors to inspire children with ecology

The biology: The horse chestnut leaf miner ('the alien'), an invasive moth species spreading throughout England and into south Wales, creates conspicuous brown patches (mines) on the leaves of horse chestnut trees, and is parasitised by a species of wasp ('the natural pest controller').

The project: School-children will provide national data on parasitism levels, by collecting horse chestnut leaves with mines and rearing out the insects: are they aliens or pest controllers?

The hypothesis: Do local levels of parasitism vary depending on how long the alien has been present?

The aim: To teach children about ecology, by letting them participate in a real scientific research project.

The roles: 10 **ambassadors** from throughout England and south Wales will assist with this project, by each recruiting 10 classes of school-children, visiting schools, inspiring pupils and teachers, collecting leaves, helping children collect data, and checking their results. Potential ambassadors will attend a training and selection day in Bristol on 7 June; those selected will visit their schools at the start (5-9 July) and end of the project (19-23 July). A small fee to cover expenses will be paid. Ambassadors may be biology students or graduates, and must have a keen interest in ecology and in 'spreading the word' about the environment. As well as recruiting participants for this experiment via ambassadors, we will achieve media coverage of the project in order to recruit more participants.

To apply: E-mail your cv with a covering letter, to Nancy Jennings, project manager, nancy@dotmoth.co.uk by 28 May 2010.

Dr Michael Pocock, University of Bristol
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