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Press Release

Green Schoolyards for a Biodiverse City

Berlin's Students Shape Future Spaces

For the fourth time, the Zoo and Tierpark Berlin awarded the "Back to Nature" Conservation Prize, once again demonstrating the strong commitment of young people to nature and species protection in the city. This year's award ceremony focused on green schoolyards: as living learning spaces, green retreats, and true biodiversity islands in the heart of urban environments.

For the first time, Carsten Schneider, the Federal Minister for Environment, Climate Protection, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety, assumed the patronage of this initiative. On site, Parliamentary State Secretary Carsten Träger said: "I am delighted when young people take responsibility and advocate for green spaces in cities. Especially in times of heatwaves and species loss, it becomes clear how important green places are for climate, nature, and social interaction. The school projects show impressive ideas of how concrete deserts can be transformed into vibrant spaces."

More Nature on the Playground

While cities continue to expand and habitats for animals and plants shrink, the award-winning schools demonstrate impressively how urban nature can be reimaged. With creative ideas and plenty of initiative, students and teachers have illustrated how sealed surfaces can give way to wild plants or how nesting sites and shaded biotopes can be created.

"When young people take responsibility for their environment, places emerge that have both ecological and social impact," said Dr. Andreas Knieriem. "The projects prove that urban nature is not only possible but necessary—and that schools and engaged young people play a crucial role."

Since this year, the educational advisory service "Grün macht Schule" (Green Makes School) has been supporting the implementation of project ideas. "Green schoolyards are more than playgrounds—they are retreats, learning spaces, and sources of creativity, community, and self-confidence. The projects mostly emerge through the initiative of the schools, in a 'help-to-self-help' model. This leads to pride in what has been achieved together, strengthens the identification of the school



community, and provides valuable support for educational work in daily school life. Democratic processes are learned, and sustainable climate protection projects become tangible," explains Ulrike Wolf from the "Grün macht Schule" team. ("Grün macht Schule" is a project in collaboration with the Senate Department for Education, Youth, and Family and the Freilandlabor Britz e.V.).

From Asphalt to Biodiversity!

A total of over 49 project ideas were submitted for this year's competition, involving around 1,100 students. The projects ranged from wild bee hotels and rainwater harvesting to the development of edible school gardens. Four schools were awarded for their projects, which particularly impressed with their ecological impact, educational concept, and involvement of the school community. This year, the winning schools were Lemgo Primary School in Kreuzberg, Müggelsee School in Friedrichshagen, Ernst-Reuter School in Gesundbrunnen, and Ernst-Ludwig-Heim Primary School in Spandau.

Conservation Begins in Everyday Life

The "Back to Nature" Conservation Prize recognizes the commitment of young people and demonstrates how environmental education can have a tangible impact—aiming to create a new generation that wants to shape their city in a greener, healthier, and more sustainable way. The award ceremony took place in the Nature Trail at the Berlin Tierpark, an exhibition that invites school classes to learn more about urban nature. Through interactive stations, children and young people learn in a hands-on way about the important roles of insects, amphibians, deadwood, and how food and farming are related to nature. The focus is on direct everyday relevance: How can everyone contribute in their own environment? What does sustainable consumption mean? And why is an old tree trunk sometimes more valuable than a freshly mown meadow?

Since the 1960s, the Tierpark School has been inspiring children and young people to connect with local nature, creating unique learning moments in direct contact with nature. Every year, young people participate in the offerings of the Tierpark School - from kindergarten trips to high school project seminars.

Background:

The competition is part of the commitment of the Berlin Zoo and Tierpark as official supporters of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030). The goal is to raise awareness, especially among children and young people, about the protection of biodiversity and natural habitats, since they will be particularly affected by the consequences of species extinction and climate change.