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Modern technology making data-gathering more effective for ecologists

ECOLOGISTS and environmentalists recently joined staff and students at Northumbria University to explore how new advances are transforming the field.

Advancing technology such as DNA analysis, drones and the effect of bioacoustics on a wide range of environmental issues, were just some of the topics discussed during the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management Conference (CIEEM), hosted by the Geography department at Northumbria.

Almost 100 consultants, researchers, graduates and students attended the regional event to hear guest speakers discuss the advancements and showcase some of their recent survey results.

Peter Glaves, Director of Enterprise and External Engagement Enterprise Fellow, at Northumbria's Geography department, said: "We were thrilled to welcome the CIEEM Conference to the University. This was the largest regional event run by the North East England Section committee and the speakers demonstrated how these recent advancements are already benefitting the industry.

"Many of the advances in survey techniques are driven by improvements in technology and several of the speakers are at the cutting edge of these developments, so it was great to hear first-hand how their work is being improved by changes in technology and how they are able to work more effectively.

"For example DNA analysis of pond water is now being used to determine if legally protected great crested newts are present on sites, while sniffer dogs are being trained to locate legally protected species in difficult-to-survey habitats.

"In other technological advances, bioacoustic recorders are allowing us to undertake monitoring of little-known species, from lobsters off the Northumbria coast to nocturnal woodland birds such as Nightjars; meanwhile drones are being used to monitor the effectiveness of agro-environmental schemes.

"Ultimately these technologies will make the work of an ecologist more accurate by improving the findings of survey information."

The event also provided an opportunity for networking and experienced CIEEM members held a series of 'career panels' to offer students and recent graduates the chance to ask questions and learn more about their work.

Peter added: "The students at Northumbria found the event really informative and the chance to speak to CIEEM members was also of huge benefit as they were able to ask questions and seek advice on a career in ecology.

“Events like this help students translate what they are learning in the classroom into the real world. It helps broaden their knowledge and ensures they are keeping up-to-date with changes within the industry.”

Vicky Bowskill, Geographic Sections Coordinator for CIEEM, said: “The work of our regional/country-based volunteer committees in putting on events like this across the UK and Ireland is invaluable. Working with the university is a great way to engage with students seeking to enter the profession, providing an ideal opportunity to network with professionals in their chosen field of study.”

For more information on the activities of the North East England Section, please visit www.cieem.net/geographic-sections

To find out more about Geography at the University, register for Northumbria’s Open Days on Friday 26 and Saturday 27 June at www.northumbria.ac.uk/openday

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