



Green Gown
Awards 2017



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University of Nottingham

Student Engagement

When beasts go large- #BeastsofUoN



University of
Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Profile

- HEI
- 44,520 students
(includes our China and Malaysia campuses)
- 6895 staff
- Urban and rural

About the project

Summary

Who are the #beastsofUoN? Fundamentally the hashtag is about celebrating the breadth of wildlife with which we share our campuses. The University has created habitats for the iconic, the eccentric and the cuddly and we have bats, butterflies, birds of prey, wildfowl, squirrels, foxes, badgers, rabbits aplenty! Students, and the community of the University of Nottingham share their green and beautiful surroundings with a startling range of often highly visible and occasionally rather eccentric animals. The #beastsofUoN roam on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Facebook, Snapchat and WeChat, and are a daily presence on the social media accounts across the University of Nottingham.

Project partners

Internally the following areas were involved in a number of #beastsofUoN activities:

Estates- Sustainability
School of Arts and Humanities
Estates- Grounds
Members of University Executive Board and Environment Committee
School of Life Sciences
External Relations- social media and both internal and external communications
Campaign and Alumni Relations office

The results

The problem

As the first University to be recognised for the quality of outdoor space by a Green Flag award in 2003, University of Nottingham has a wealth of outstanding outdoor space, ranging from the historic Victorian parklands and gardens of University Park, to the regenerated brownfield site of Jubilee Campus, to the countryside setting of Sutton Bonington, with its arboretum and lime tree avenue.



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Nevertheless, there is a disconnect between the promotion of our outdoor areas, and particularly the wide range of wildlife that share these spaces, and the way that our University community, especially young adults, as “digital natives”, consume and share information.

The approach

Students, staff and members of the community at the University of Nottingham share their green and beautiful surroundings with a startling range of often highly visible and occasionally rather eccentric animals, and these animals have become known collectively as the #beastsofUoN. The #beastsofUoN roam on Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Snapchat and WeChat, and they are a daily presence on the social media accounts of the University of Nottingham.

We recognise that sustainability needs to be fun and engaging. If it isn't we will struggle to engage people in the issues and fail to make an impact. The core of #beastsofUoN activity includes a campus wildlife calendar using the best photos of our outdoor spaces to raise funds for the University's Impact campaign; a #beastsofUoN photography competition open to the whole University community; April Fools' stories released by the University starring some infamous campus wildlife. This is supported by continuous social media activity using the hashtag which recognises the contributions of the wider University community in tacitly promoting biodiversity.

In a competitive university environment, where many universities are involved in ambitious campus development schemes, #beastsofUoN provides a much needed counterpoint in highlighting the quality of our outdoor spaces and encouraging a relationship with the remarkable variety of wildlife that call our campuses home.

Our goals

- Increase visibility of our exceptional outdoor spaces and the wildlife that live there
- Promote initiative across all campuses in UK and Asia to encourage a shared community around biodiversity
- Harness social media as a news source for young adults in the promotion of biodiversity
- Promote campuses as spaces of health and wellbeing
- Increase engagement and followers across UoN Sustainability social media

Obstacles and solutions

Lack of awareness of the diversity of campus fauna	Share photos widely on social media, promote the campus wildlife calendar for its inclusion of rarer species
Low engagement from student body on biodiversity issues	Use social media as key engagement tool around biodiversity
Lack of imagery reflecting the University's outdoor spaces	Run a photo competition open to whole University community

Performance and results

#BeastsofUoN has been one of the most engaging tools for communicating with students and a University audience, and particularly in encouraging students to develop a relationship with our outdoor environments.



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The #beastsofUoN photo competition, open between February and April 2017, proved to be exceedingly successful, with fantastic reach for a student audience. Of a total 214 entries, 148 photos were entered by students, and 14 by alumni across both our UK and Asia campuses. Not only did the entries depict an incredible range of wildlife on campus, the photo competition overall was wildly successful in enthusing student groups and University departments across the University to get involved.

We have seen a marked increase in engagement across UoN Sustainability Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts through using the #beastsofUoN as an engagement tool. Judicious use of the #beastsofUoN hashtag, coupled with our projects on the theme, has been pivotal in increasing post reach, sustaining audience interest and increasing our Twitter followers by over 50% in 12 months.

The future

Lessons learned

Social media is key in engaging an audience of young adults who are accustomed to finding information through these channels. Different social media platforms work well with different audiences – particularly important with regards to China and Malaysia. Sharing the contributions of others beyond the sustainability team is crucial in engaging a new audience, and the initial engagement ask is low key: simply a like or a share. The overwhelming success of the photo competition in particular shows the latent interest in the area of biodiversity, and offers opportunities to further share students' contributions on the theme.

Top 3 learnings from implementing your project

- 1 Everyone likes photos of cute, eccentric and quirky animals on campus
- 2 A strong theme will be organically taken up and endorsed by students to fellow students via the best social media channels
- 3 Harness student interest in the subject matter, and use this as a tool to talk about broader campus biodiversity and sustainability

Sharing your project

Featured in internal *Social Media in Academia* and *Social Media in Research* conferences

Celebrating successes on social media has been recognised by other HEIs

Part of the University wide community outreach event- [Wonder](#)

#BeastsofUoN videos have been shared on YouTube: [2016 #fatsquirrels](#) and [2017 #goosetunnel](#)

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

"Being a finalist in the Green Gown Awards would bring an accolade that everyone understands, just like winning an Oscar. Success would therefore drive on students and staff who work tirelessly to embed social responsibility and sustainability as guiding values of Nottingham".

Further information

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