

Environmental education programme River Watch supported by CCB arrived Belarus about two years ago and captured the imagination of several schools straight away. Expansion continues with more schools in the northern areas of Belarus, which are part of the river Dvina (Daugava) basin.

Irina Kulikova, environmental activist and co-coordinator of the River Watch programme from Shumilino village, tells:

--We have been running training courses on the River Watch programme for school teachers and pupils for nearly two years now. We started with the first course in 2006 in the summer camping near the river Obole – Dvina’s tributary. The river Obole and its environment has become the study object. This summer 20 pupils from 20 schools from Vitebsk Oblast attended the training course. They spent 7 days in the wild nature investigating the river with bio-indication techniques, doing bird watching and collecting and identifying plants. Scientists from the Belarus Academy of Sciences, Baranovichi State University and Sakharov University were involved in teaching as well as Lithuanian colleagues from the Klaipeda NGO Zvienie who advised Belorussian teachers on the implementation of the River Watch program and provided some training materials.



Training on the Obole river bank. (Photo: Irina Kulikova)

For Belarus school children this way of study, which is very different from the traditional biology classes, has become the exciting discovery of the world of ecology. All findings and observations children recoded in their diaries

and made photographs. In addition to the study the practical measures were implemented by children to protect the river Obole’s bank from erosion - they planted willow trees along the river bank.



Canoeing on the Obole river. (Photo: Irina Kulikova)

In the end of the course a “Dvina-Daugava” exhibition of photographs made by children was organized and later displayed in several schools in the area.

Through the River Watch programme children acquire new valuable knowledge, which is being passed on to their peers in school and to parents at home. This dissemination process helps to change attitude and encourage environmentally friendly behavior.

In Belarus the River Watch programme was initiated by Natalya Parechina, the project leader (NGO Bird Life Protection). She developed training materials and case studies for teachers and run initial seminars with teachers in several districts of the Vitebsk Oblast.

This year the Neman Environment Group is going to organize the River Watch workshop to the school teachers in Ostrovets district which is located in the Neman-Vilia river basin.

Nina Palutskaya
5 September 2007