

# LUGS ON TOUR

## PyCon UK 2014

**Josette Garcia** has a grand old time with the Python community.

In September, Coventry welcomed PyCon UK – a conference of the Python community, by the community, and for the Python community. This year was the largest ever with just under 500 delegates in attendance. As usual at PyCon UK, you get more than just Python.

For a start, there were some excellent keynote speakers.

A highlight was Van Lindberg (the chair of the Python Software Foundation – the charitable organisation that owns the intellectual property for Python and promotes its use). He talked about the growing success of Python and flagged some warning signs that need to be addressed if Python is to remain one of the world's most popular programming languages.

Perhaps the most warmly received keynote was that given by Carrie Anne Philbin of the Raspberry Pi Foundation. She eloquently told the assembled conference of her journey as a teacher overcoming the prejudice of colleagues, learning Python,

attending PyCon UK a few years ago and ultimately landing a dream job promoting the educational strengths of the Raspberry Pi. She was especially passionate in encouraging delegates to get involved with all the various educational activities happening at PyCon UK and elsewhere.

Within the main conference the talks and practical workshops were distributed into parallel tracks. As a result, there were always a lot of different things going on with many people moving between activities and bumping into friends old and new in the famous “corridor track”.

Workshops included Python in the cloud, game programming with Python, machine learning and a test-driven-development study group. The talks included such snappy titles as “Python for

**“The main conference is more like Hogwarts or Willy Wonka’s than an academic conference.”**



The Python community likes to borrow from the works of Monty Python – including their theme tune.

Zombies”, “Simulating Quantum Systems”, “Is that jumper made of cats?” and the rather loud “Trouble at t’LeedsDataMill” (which featured a brass band and live tubas).

The main conference is wonderfully eccentric: more like Hogwarts or Willy Wonka’s factory than, say, an academic conference or corporate event (despite the attendance of several professors of computer science and corporate interests such as premier sponsor Bank of America).

### Education, education, education

A well known aspect of PyCon UK is its education track, which proves Guido van Rossum was correct when he said that “Python was created as a language for anyone to use”. To this end 45 teachers were sponsored to join the conference and took part in a professional training day to work with developers and each other on matters pedagogical. Many went away inspired to try teaching with Python in their schools and several want to



All the kids who turned up walked away with a Raspberry Pi, thanks to the Raspberry Pi Foundation.

return to tell next year's conference about the fruits of their labours.

On the Saturday of the conference, 75 children joined the delegates for adventures in coding with Python. Under the guidance of experts they learned all about using Python to program *Minecraft*, robots, Raspberry Pi and quadcopters (to name but a few of the activities available). Each child was given a Raspberry Pi (thanks to the generous support of the RaspberryPi Foundation) as part of a very generous swag bag.

In fact every delegate (young or old) got a T-shirt, mug and squeaky rubber "debug duck". Apparently, you're supposed to tell the duck your programming woes and it will silently help you discover a solution.

Diversity was also a hot topic with more women than ever before attending and speaking at the

conference and with a 3-to-2 ratio in favour of girls at the kids' day.

Non-Pythonic happenings included the beer at the conference meal. It was brewed by Ben Croston of FuzzyDuck brewery in a process automated by RaspberryPi and Python scripts. It turns out that Ben also plays the tuba and was joined by Nicholas Tolvervey (one of the speakers whose talk used a brass band) in an impromptu tuba duet of the Monty Python theme tune "Liberty Bell".

Conference chair John Pinner asked me to run the charity "Cheese Shop" (unlike the famous Monty Python sketch, this cheese shop was full of cheese donated by the delegates who were encouraged to supply cheese representative of their home regions). Wonderfully creamy Nottinghamshire Stilton, Oxford Blue, caramelised goat



**Delegates brought cheese, which was sold to other delegates and profits donated to the Mynton Children's Hospice.**

cheese from Norway, Epoisse and Roquefort from France and various other regional cheese from the United Kingdom were sold in aid of the Mynton Children's Hospice.

I hear planning has already started for next year's event. I'll certainly be there. You should too!

Write once,  
deploy everywhere.



ubuntu®