

Project report: All About Woods

May 2018 to January 2019



Objectives

The AONB works to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, landscape and the wildlife of the Shropshire Hills AONB. In addition to this it aims to raise the awareness of people to appreciating the environment they live in, and in particular young people who will inherit the area. Our project has contributed towards both of these aims.

A further AONB objective is to raise awareness and conservation activity, particularly amongst young people in the area. There is a need to conserve the character and quality of the Shropshire Hills landscape as they are under increasing pressure, and the condition of a number of the special qualities of the AONB is declining, partly through changes in land management but also through neglect. In explaining how sustainable management can diversify ecosystems such as natural woodlands, we demonstrated how these areas can be improved and in so doing also grow woodland products for local people.

Furthermore, we gave young people the opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the woodlands, whilst learning useful skills and learning about the environment.

Achievements

We brought young people into woodlands to demonstrate the richness and diversity of the environment, whilst helping them to understand and conserve the landscape and to learn about managing and utilising woodland sustainably. We provided a series of training and awareness raising events that introduced participants to the woodland environment and the theory and practice of woodland management.

The project was managed by Gary Cowell, and delivered by him and a number of other enrichment session leaders (detailed below), with help from Lightfoot volunteers. Gary also works for Knighton Tree Allotments Trust, thus incorporating specific woodland management expertise into the project.

There were 2 different activities:

1. A full day taster session held in the grounds of the Community College, Bishop's Castle and the neighbouring SpArC centre in order to promote the enrichment sessions.
2. "Enrichment" afternoons in the autumn term 2018 with up to 11 students, one teacher and one teaching assistant of the Community College, Bishop's Castle.

Full Day Taster Session

The programme started on 20th June 2018 with a taster day where around 80 pupils - all of Year 7 and some of Year 8 - were busy doing woodland activities on the school grounds and in the grounds of the SpArC centre.

One activity was learning 'How to Safely Fell and Tidy' a small tree using bow-saws and loppers. The pupils worked in small teams and were instructed by Gary Cowell. Another activity was 'Wildlife Roleplay' with Jenny Ogden where young people took on the identity of pollinating insects with large and very beautiful models. The third activity was

'An Eye for Detail' with Toni Pettitt who sent the young people searching for specific trees and plants she had given clues for in mysterious little paper bags.



Illustration 1: Tidying a small felled tree on the Taster Day

The feedback from the pupils was really positive with comments including *"I really enjoyed being outside and from my point of view more learning should be done outside"* and *"The best thing today was learning how to cut a tree in the direction you want it to fall. It was fun when we used the tools to cut the smaller branches. The funniest thing was watching the others wearing flower hats and bee hats!"*

Bishop's Castle Community College Enrichment Sessions

Eight sessions were delivered over 6 afternoons after illness and a school timetable clash meant that the final 3 sessions – one on Practical Tool Use and two on Den Building - were delivered in one much longer session.

1. Introduction to Woodlands and Woodland Management, Friday 7th September 2018 on site from 1.45pm to 3pm

Session Lead: Gary Cowell Lightfoot assistant: Dave Thomlinson

Location: The Hurst, Clunton, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 0JA

This was an introduction to woodlands in a landscape context and how we manage them both historically and today. During this visit we carried out some tree identification work and looked at drying firewood using traditional seasoning methods; the children were set the challenge of designing and building a log stack that would season timber using miniature cordwood. A serendipitous highlight for the group was hearing a large tree fall in the distance during the session.

2. Wildlife Roleplay – *The Hawthorn*, Friday 21st September 2018 1.45pm to 3pm

Session Lead: Jenny Ogdan Lightfoot assistant: Alison Weeks

Location: Grounds of Bishop's Castle Community College, Bishop's Castle, SY9 5AY

In this interactive take on wildlife we learnt about the role of the Hawthorn tree and the species that rely on it. Scripted interviews with insects, birds and mammals encouraged empathy with them and raised awareness of their

importance in the grand scheme of things. The children really enjoyed acting out the different roles and learnt how many creatures rely on hedgerows as a home.

3. **Woodland Wildlife**, Friday 5th October 2018 on site from 1.45pm to 3pm

Session Lead: Alan Reid Lightfoot assistant: Alison Weeks

Location: Bury Ditches, Lower Down, Lydbury North, SY7 8BD

Alan Reid, Learning Ranger for the Forestry Commission, showed the kind of evidence to look for in woodlands to see what wildlife is present. He showed various droppings, bones/skulls, fur and owl pellets before leading the group through the woodland to look for signs of the animals that live there. The children were particularly struck by the way a dormouse makes a hole in a hazelnut.



Illustration 2: Woodland Wildlife Walk with Alan Reid and Nicola Cowell of the Forestry Commission

4. **Fungi Foray**, Friday 19th October 2018 on site from 1.45pm to 3pm

Session Lead: John Hughes Lightfoot assistant: Alison Weeks

Location: Bury Ditches, Lower Down, Lydbury North, SY7 8BD

Britain is one of the best places in the world for fungi. John Hughes of Shropshire Wildlife Trust led a walk around Bury Ditches wood, finding and identifying a range of fungi species. The children reported that the best part of the session was finding the mushrooms and a number of them said how impressed they were that there are thousands of different species, some of them are poisonous.

5. **An Eye for Detail**, Friday 9th November 2018 on site from 1.45pm to 3pm

Session Lead: Antonia Pettitt Lightfoot assistant: Dave Thomlinson

Location: Grounds of Clun Memorial Hall, Clun, SY7 8NY

This activity encouraged independent exploring of the natural environment through guided tasks. The participants were divided into small groups and given a bag of curiosities – samples of leaves, petals, flowers, etc. from the site.

They matched up their samples with the natural environment to try and identify where the sample came from and guessed what that species was. The children really enjoyed the treasure hunt and learnt how to identify Elder by its hollow stem. They also learnt that “a Cherry tree is like a tiger” because of the striped bark.

6. Practical Tool Use and Den Building, Friday 7th December 2018 on site from 11.30am to 3pm

Session Lead: Gary Cowell Lightfoot assistant: Dave Thomlinson

Location: The Hurst, Clunton, Craven Arms, Shropshire, SY7 0JA

In this extended session there was a tree-felling demonstration, followed by the participants cutting the felled tree to provide materials for the den building session. The focus was on how to safely and efficiently use hand tools and the selection of useful building materials. Working in groups of 3 to 4, the participants built dens using found materials and wood from the trees felled in earlier sessions. The challenge was to build a den large enough for the 3 or 4 builders to shelter in. The dens were subject to peer review and discussions around what makes a good shelter. Helen Plastow, the Community College lead on the enrichment sessions, judged the dens and declared that the group that had built a den large enough for 10 people was the winner.

The feedback from the group showed that they were very impressed by the demonstration felling, with a number now claiming that they know how to cut down a tree and one even saying that they now know how to use a chainsaw!



Illustration 3: Building the winning den at The Hurst

Each session, apart from the last one, was for 1.25 to 1.5 hours on site. Teacher, Helen Plastow drove the college minibus to each site. The students enjoyed the visits, being out in woodlands. They looked, listened and learnt about trees, woodlands, flora and fauna and woodland skills. They gained practical experience of using various hand tools to cut timber.

Feedback forms were issued for each of the sessions. These showed that the students enjoyed the practical activities and generally rated the sessions good to very good. When asked if anything was missing from the day the answer was almost always “nothing”; when asked if anything could be added to the day, again the answer was almost always “no” with a couple of comments on how the sessions could have been longer.

The pupils were asked:

How would you rate today's activity? (please put an "X" anywhere on the dashed line)



Not at all good

Somewhat good

Very good

The line was 10cm long, giving us an easy way to convert the answers into marks out of ten for the activity. The results were:

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6
	Introduction session at the Hurst with Gary Cowell	Wildlife Roleplay with Jenny Ogden	Wildlife walk with Alan Reid	Fungi Foray with John Hughes	An Eye for Detail with Toni Pettitt	Felling / Tool Use / Den Building with Gary Cowell
Scores out of 10	10	10	6	5	8	10
	7	6.5	9	5.5	7.5	10
	8.5	10	7.5	10	5	10
	5	7.5	7.5	5	5	10
	5.5	9	8	10	5	10
	5	6.5	8	9.5	6	10
		10	7.5	6	6	10
		10	10	6.5	8.5	10
		5.5	7	7	9	8
		10		9.5		10
		6		10		
Average	6.83	8.27	7.83	7.64	6.67	9.80
Sample size	6	11	9	11	9	10

Special conditions

We provided information about the AONB to all participants in the form of a leaflet supplied by the AONB office.

The support of AONB was acknowledged on all publicity (supplied) and course materials.

Health and Safety Risk Assessments were written for all activities.

What we learnt

The combination of the last 3 sessions into one day actually worked better than what we had planned as it allowed the participants much more time in the wood. The activity with Bishops Castle Community College was well received by students and staff, to the extent that the college have asked us to offer further enrichment sessions in 2019.