

Brynmawr Farm Summer Club

Project Review

The project's aim was to provide a service for young people aged between 11-14 year olds during the summer holidays when there is less activities available for this age bracket. It proved a difficult task to fill the spaces for the original amount of young people (12 places), so it was instead agreed to run the project on a half scale basis to accommodate up to 6 young people per session. There were certainly perks to doing this, as the children received a lot more one-to-one attention from myself as a leader, and I feel the quality of the learning experiences each young person received was increased. This was reflected in the feedback forms where 100% reported they had enjoyed the sessions and had learnt something from the sessions, and had gained a deeper understanding of how to combine environmental issues with farming.

"I think all kids should be made to do this kind of thing." - Will, 12

Week 1: Welcome to Brynmawr Organic Farm

As we arrived at the farm on the first week, we took a moment to get to know one another and our whereabouts. We made our base at the outdoors classroom and started collecting some firewood ready for a hot drink later in the day. As we waited for Trevor to arrive to give us a tour of the farm, we practiced some practical skills and tool use, and made use of some of the nearby willow and had a little play with weaving a dish.

Trevor arrived and gave a great tour of the farm, and an explanation for why he farms organic and what it means to farm organic. This was critical information for the young people, especially for two males who both want to go into farming, but so far had no real understanding of what organic farming is and only had commercial farming backgrounds. Trevor exemplified the difference very well, highlighting that under commercial farming cow and sheep pats there is very little that is able to survive due to the high volume of non-organic matters they consume, compared to his fields where an abundance of invertebrate life thrives under all the cow and sheep pats - which is critical to the health of his soils so that he doesn't have to rely on ploughing and spraying. It was a great moment seeing the penny drop with learning these new facts. Another interesting moment arose when we started discussing organic vs. non-organic farming, and gently raising some moral thoughts on commercial farming. These thoughts became ever more prevalent when the young people met the pigs and the cows in the barn, and were taken back by just how friendly, happy and tame these animals were compared to the animals they had so far come across in their commercial farming experiences.



Week 2: Hands-on with Daisy the Cow

This week was being led by Trevor's wife, Gleice. Gleice introduced us to the newest members of the farm: Holly the cow, and her calf, Daisy. No one had any experience of dairy farming, and were keen and hesitant at the same time. Everyone was a little concerned to hear the calls between mother and calf prior to being united for milking -it was good for thought of what dairy farming on actually consists of, i.e. separating cows and calves. All the young people had a go at milking Holly, and after much reluctance, everyone did finally try some of the fresh warm milk!

Next we went onto processing the milk. Gleice showed us how to separate the milk and cream, and how to churn the cream into butter, and also how to make cheese. This was all new to the young people and the amount of hands-on time to produce these basic day to day foods came as a bit of a surprise. While we were waiting to do our cheese-tending duties we got a campfire going, practiced some more tool use, and cooked some fresh Brynmawr beef burgers.

It was clear the young people enjoyed the chance of getting to be hands-on with Daisy and Holly. Knowing how much the young people enjoyed these simple tasks with the animals, we thought it best to make it a regular job on the farm for them.



Week 3: Sheep Sorting

This week, a large task lay ahead: Sheep sorting. This included herding the sheep into the barn, running them through the foot bath, weaning the lambs, separating the older ewes, worm treating, checking for signs of bad health and treating accordingly - of course, all done organically. It was a busy day where everyone worked well as a team to see that Trevor was given as much help as possible. It became clear to the young people that many of the everyday workings of an organic and non-organic farm don't differ. By the afternoon there was a lovely atmosphere amongst the young people who had bonded well and were enjoying the company of Trevor's visiting grandchildren as well.



Week 4: Practical Conservation at Rhos Fiddle with Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Clive Dean, Shropshire Wildlife Trust Ranger, was meant to be leading this day with a tour of Rhos Fiddle and its key wildlife features, followed by an afternoon of practical conservation on the heathland. Unfortunately, the weather was dire and little option was given but to cancel the day. As Clive eloquently put it, "Rhos Fiddle can be a very bleak place to find yourself on a rainy day." So with great regret, the day was cancelled.

Week 5: Water Wildlife with Mike Kelly

We had three new young people join us for this day with Mike Kelly. The aim of the day was to look at as many of the different water systems as possible within Brynmawr Farm so that a broad picture of different water systems and qualities, and their different inhabitants, would start to emerge. As soon as the first sample came out of the most established pond at the farm, there was much excitement. We were lucky to see a very fine example of a well established and healthy ecosystem, with numerous newts and different species present in all the samples. We then went to examine the newer pond, which turned out to be more fruitful than originally expected with a number of mayfly larvae present. The upper wet area was a good example of the lifecycle of an ecosystem, as the wet area had slowly developed into more of a 'bog' with a distinct low quality to the water and vegetation, with numerous wet woodland trees emerging, suggesting perhaps the wet area may disappear altogether to become a wet woodland. We ended the day by looking at a flowing water system, the stream. Despite having high expectations for this area we didn't come across the desired species, but we came across an abundance of cased caddisfly in a variety of disguises.

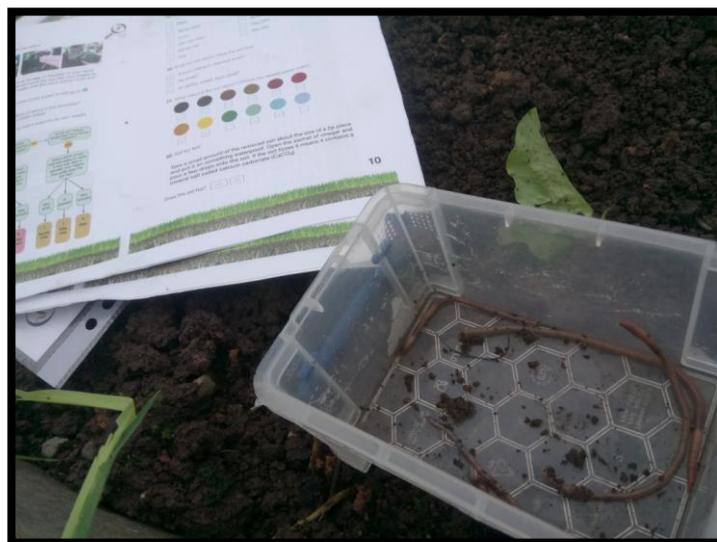


Throughout the day, there was abundance of new wildlife introduced to the young people, and Mike delivered it in a way that engaged all the participants and allowed them to explore using their own curiosity. The feedback was enthusiastic and positive from all participants, with a deeper appreciation of our freshwaters and their wildlife. And we even managed to fit in some creative therapy time with some nail and string art - another new thing that complimented the day and added to the overall experience for the young people.



Week 6: Final Week at the Farm

We started the day by heading up to the poly-tunnel and conducting a soil survey. I thought it important that the young people have a deeper understanding of what is arguably at the root of all farming, and how we can use simple techniques to identify its value. So, we counted worms and tried our very best to identify them! By no means are any of us now worm experts, but the young people now know how to identify a soil's health at a basic level.



Under the request of the young people, a day of helping Trevor with the animals was organised for our last session. By now, we knew the drill of helping get the sheep in and we helped sort through some of the remaining ones from the sorting we had started earlier in the week. Trevor's boar stole all our hearts! It was an absolute pleasure getting to know this gentle giant, and once again it offered a great insight into why we should be treating all animals with respect, and just how happy these animals can be when we do. I have no doubt that the young people's attitudes towards animals have taken a turn, hopefully with them recognising that farming on a smaller and more environmentally friendly scale can be much more beneficial for the animals, for the farming experience, and for the environment. When I asked one of the participants if this experience had changed his attitude towards how he would farm in the future, his reply was "No. Well, except for the whole organic thing." I felt as if we had accomplished something huge in this transformation!

