

# Project report: Experiencing Biodiversity (CF2122.8)

May 2021 to April 2022



## Introduction

We focus on biodiversity: what it is, how it can be enhanced, how it is valued by people. Many of the young people we work with are closely linked to working in the landscape of the area, and those that aren't can be encouraged to learn more about their environment. We wish to support the curriculum in teaching about climate and ecological matters, and we work with the Community College, Bishop's Castle on this subject. The idea is to promote ideas about the value and importance of the area in which they live, and the wider world too.

We have helped to link the students with the conservation work that is being done in this part of south Shropshire, by linking with the AONB Young Rangers programme. This will give valuable experience to young people to take ownership of their area, and vitally important decisions they may make in the future regarding this.

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 young people to appreciate the environment they live in, as they will inherit this area.

## Achievements

We helped young people to understand and conserve the landscape by providing a series of training and awareness raising events. These were held in the the environment immediately surrounding the Community College and the SpArC Centre.

The project was managed by Alison Weeks (of Lightfoot Enterprises) and Gary Cowell (of Offa Glyndŵr Services), and delivered by Gary and a number of other enrichment session leaders as detailed below, with help from Lightfoot volunteers. Gary also works for Knighton Community Woodlands Group, thus incorporating specific woodland management expertise into the project.

Our original aims were to:

- deliver active learning to experience and understand biodiversity and its value in local woodlands, wild places and the local environment – through an activity day in the summer term attended by 60+ children, or a year group. Plus, 8 fortnightly outdoor enrichment sessions through the autumn term for groups of up to 15 young people
- support out of school activities for young people such as Young Rangers
- offer Experiencing Biodiversity as a pilot to other schools and groups of young people in the area

These aims were delivered or exceeded:

- We delivered a suite of activities at the Summer School on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2021, and 11 Enrichment Sessions for groups of up to 20 young people
- Through the involvement of Joe Penfold, the Young Rangers Project Officer for the Shropshire Hills AONB, we were able to link with out of school activities
- We have promoted the availability of our approach to other schools, through South Shropshire Climate Action.

Each of these are covered in more detail below.

## Delivery of Activities at the Community College, Bishop's Castle

### Full Day at the Summer School

We delivered a suite of activities at the Summer School that the Community College ran in lieu of the usual Taster Days that were cancelled due to Covid. On Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2021 we delivered activities on and around the College site:

1. **An Eye for Detail** – Toni Pettitt, Branching Out Forest School. This activity encourages independent exploring of the natural environment through guided tasks.

2. **Tree, See, Draw, Explore** – Angela Martin, Illustrator and Cartoonist. Observational and imaginative drawing and collage of trees, concentrating on the detail and image of trees and plants.

3.a. **Woodland Crafts** – Joe Penfold, Young Rangers Project Officer, Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership. Making bird feeders.

3.b. **Den Building** – Gary Cowell, Woodsman / Knighton Community Woodlands Group. The dens were subjected to peer review and discussions around what makes a good shelter and the sustainable growth and use of woodland products.

A group of 25 children was assigned by the college to the *Experiencing Biodiversity* theme for the day. Those children were then divided into 3 groups of around 8 children for each activity. The 3 groups then rotated through all of the activities for the day, with the group on activity 3 further split between the 2 activities. Whilst we reached a smaller group than anticipated, the children were able to do all 3 activities and were able to spend longer on each activity.



Illustration 1: Areas of the Community College / SpArC grounds used for the different activities.

### Community College Enrichment Sessions

Our plan had been to deliver our previous offer of 7 or 8 different Enrichment Sessions over the Autumn term to a self-selecting group of up to 15 pupils. We expected the pupils to be with us from the start of the lunch break until the end of the school day (approx. 2.5 hours), as they had been for the previous 4 years, and that we would be able to take the pupils off-site.

However, the Community College had changed the way that Enrichment Sessions were to be run and instead asked us to provide 12 sessions over the Autumn and Spring terms for up to 20 pupils per Session; the pupils would be assigned to the Experiencing Biodiversity theme, rather than choosing it themselves, and would be with us for 3 sessions rather than 7 or 8. They would be with us from just after afternoon registration to the start of the coaching session that concludes the school day – approx. 1 hour 15 mins – and would have to remain within the grounds of the Community College and SpArC.

We reviewed our budget for the project and, although we knew that delivering the extra Enrichment Sessions would be extremely demanding within the funding we had, decided that we could achieve what was asked. We were pleased that, between the Summer School day and the Enrichment Sessions, we would be able to deliver 3 different activities to all pupils in Year 7. One of our sessions, **Tree, See, Draw, Explore**, due to take place on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022, was later cancelled by the Community College as the pupils were away on a residential trip.

The 3 different Enrichment Sessions delivered were **An Eye for Detail** and **Tree, See, Draw, Explore**, as described above, and a **Woodlands Skills and Crafts** session delivered jointly by Gary Cowell and Joe Penfold to meet adult to pupil ratios for safe outdoor working using tools. The **Woodlands Skills and Crafts** session varied in its content each half-term and included:

- **Den Building**

- **Cordwood Challenge** – could the children solve a 3-D puzzle and build a model stack of cordwood timber!
- **Making bird feeders**
- **Making bird boxes**
- **Directional felling and high pruning of trees**
- **Egg Box Scavenger Hunt** - eggs boxes were labelled with “spikey”, “tickly”, “sticky”, “soft” and “smooth” – the challenge was to find something in the area that met each of the descriptions.

Date	1st Half Autumn Term	Session Leader	Session Activity
17/09/2021	Group A, Session 1	Gary Cowell	Den building, Cordwood stack puzzle, and Egg Box Scavenger Hunt
01/10/2021	Group A, Session 2	Angela Martin	Tree, See, Draw, Explore
15/10/2021	Group A, Session 3	Toni Pettitt	An Eye for Detail
Date	2nd Half Autumn Term	Session Leader	Session Activity
05/11/2021	Group B, Session 1	Angela Martin	Tree, See, Draw, Explore
19/11/2021	Group B, Session 2	Toni Pettitt	An Eye for Detail
03/12/2021	Group B, Session 3	Joe Penfold & Gary Cowell	Den building, Cordwood stack puzzle, directional felling
Date	1st Half Spring Term	Session Leader	Session Activity
14/01/2022	Group C, Session 1	Toni Pettitt	An Eye for Detail
28/01/2022	Group C, Session 2	Angela Martin	Tree, See, Draw, Explore
11/02/2022	Group C, Session 3	Joe Penfold & Gary Cowell	Directional felling and high pruning
Date	2nd Half Spring Term	Session Leader	Session Activity
04/03/2022	Group D, Session 1	Session cancelled by College due to residential trip.	
18/03/2022	Group D, Session 2	Sarah Fraser - in for Toni	An Eye for Detail
01/04/2022	Group D, Session 3	Joe Penfold & Gary Cowell	Den building, directional felling / Making and installing bird boxes

Table 1: The programme of Enrichment Sessions delivered



Illustration 2: Pupils attending *Tree, See, Draw, Explore* Enrichment Sessions with Angela Martin and their drawings



Illustration 3: Pupils attending *An Eye for Detail* Enrichment Sessions with Toni Pettitt



Illustration 4: Pupils attending *Woodland Skills and Crafts* Enrichment Sessions with Joe Penfold and Gary Cowell



distributed leaflets about Young Rangers' events at the Community College and told those attending about the Young Rangers.

This partnership has worked so well that Joe will now be taking the lead on future work at the Community College with support from Lightfoot volunteers and, possibly, Gary Cowell. Joe will work with the Community College to develop not only a Friday afternoon Enrichment programme but also out-of-hours and off-site Young Rangers activities that will allow pupils to gain AQA accredited qualifications and contribute to the College's Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. This is a very positive outcome of our project.

### **Offering "Experiencing Biodiversity" as a pilot to other schools and groups of young people in the area**

This aspect of the project was delivered by Alison Weeks as part of her involvement with the Education theme of South Shropshire Climate Action (<https://southshropshireclimateaction.org/communities-and-education>). The education theme group shares and learns about climate change education and mitigation over south-west Shropshire schools, individuals and communities, and in the education communities beyond.

One result of this is that Stokesay Primary School is in active negotiation with Gary Cowell regarding carrying out activities with the school at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre.

### **Conclusion**

We were able to deliver a varied and successful programme of activities to all pupils of Year 7 at the Community College – indeed a larger programme than we had anticipated. We would have appreciated more time with the pupils, and would have liked to have taken them off-site, but were able to work within the constraints that we had. We have now developed links with the wider Shropshire Hills landscape that will allow an expanded range of activities not only for the pupils of the Community College, Bishop's Castle, but other schools in the area.