



**BRANCHING
OUT**
FOREST SCHOOL &
SOCIAL FORESTRY

Forest School in the Shropshire Hills AONB Project Review 2021



The story behind the project...



Vision

This project sought to offer 3 sets of 3-day 50% funded Forest School sessions for children aged between 6-11 years old. It intended to deliver affordable outdoor education and awareness-raising activities that related to the Shropshire Hills AONB, and its conservation, namely in the high priority area of a native woodland.

Overall Aims of the Project:

- Encouraging children to feel connected to the natural world.
- Children gaining an increased awareness and knowledge in the key priority species and Shropshire specific species found in their surrounding natural environment.

- An increased interest in children to conserve the natural world and to take physical action in being part of this conservation work, and awareness in how this can be done.
- An improved sense of wellbeing in children through holistic teaching methods that incorporate hands-on and engaging Forest School activities that promote:
 - developing social skills
 - developing a sense of self responsibility and self-sufficiency
 - equipping children with a knowledge of using tools
 - developing a sense of community for the children to belong to
- Children gaining awareness in local bodies that work in conservation and land management of the natural world as future job prospects.

What we accomplished...



**BRANCHING
OUT**
FOREST SCHOOL &
SOCIAL FORESTRY



"100% places fully booked"

"50% more professionals volunteered their time compared to the original budget"

"33% additional volunteers assisted the sessions compared to the original budget"

100% of parents felt their child had learnt something from the sessions, with 84% of children having enjoyed the sessions 'a great deal' and 16% enjoying the sessions 'a lot'

100% of parents thought the sessions provided a good service for the community, and rated the project as 'very good' and would like to see future sessions.



Summer Half-Term



Day 1:

We started the week with a bat theme, taking inspiration from the local Bat Conservation house within Bucknell Woods, looked after by the Vincent Wildlife Trust. We played games to learn about the different types of species in the UK, and chatted further about the species found within our local native woodland and their different nesting, flying and eating habits. And no bat day in the woods would be complete without a blindfold game showing the role of echo-location, or making a pine cone bat!

Day 2:

Today was a deer kind of day, where we learnt about the different species of deer found within the UK and their habitat preferences, bringing us onto discussing what our local deer species are. In particular we looked at the long haired fallow deer, unique to Shropshire.

We created clay deer, and practiced our stealth skills and using our peripheral vision and other senses to sense danger in group games and activities. With our new enthusiasm for deer, we also discussed the role of coppicing and the need for deer management in our native woodlands.

Day 3:

We were lucky enough to be joined by Kate Green, local artist and butterfly enthusiast, who hosted a fabulous day full of activities based around butterflies. In particular, Kate talked about the White Letter Hairstreak butterfly and her recent egg finds. Kate led some butterfly conservation activities (planting buddleia cuttings and butterfly-friendly wildflower seeds to take home). We also created beautiful butterfly puppets using hapa zome and some basic green wood working skills - so much fun!

Summer Holidays



Day 1:

Wildlife Roleplay joined us and brought along examples of different bees: The buff tailed bumble bee, red mason bee and honey bee. We practiced practical conservation skills by drilling mason bee sized holes into bee friendly pieces of wood and making some wildflower seed bombs to be taken home. We all got crafty and made bee puppets using pine cones, ivy and willow. Young Rangers leader, Joe Penfold, joined us too, and was put to good use with his den building skills. This was a great opportunity to introduce Young Rangers to our older crowd, with a follow up email sent to parents with more information for them.

Day 2:

What a magical day! The talented Anne Belgrave, renowned nature felt artist, introduced the magical and mystical hare: a symbolism of our British countryside.

The children were entranced! It was captivating, and brought performance to the woods and opened up for lots of hare talk and discussion on the declining numbers. We made clay hares, felted silver moons, and whittled fungi so everyone had a magical woodland scene to take home.

Day 3:

Forestry England's Shropshire Wildlife Ranger, Alan Reid, joined us to talk all things woodland birds! In particular, we discussed goshawks - Alan's specialty. We dissected owl pellets supplied from Shropshire Barn Owl Trust to learn about birds' diets and studied different birds' feathers. We then had challenges to create nests and had an egg throwing challenge - topped off with Capture the Egg games! Finally, some beautiful wings were drawn using our freshly made charcoal and whittled elder pencils.

Autumn Half-Term



Day 1:

We were joined by Shropshire Wildlife Trust's hedgehog specialist, Kathryn Jones, who ran a great session teaching the group tons about hedgehogs. Kathryn got the children making their own hedgehog hibernaculums - explaining the importance of providing these spaces over the coming months - and clay hedgehogs to go in them. Perfect! We followed this up with some hedgehog games, and hedgehog inspired whittling activities - a day to encourage everyone to do what they can for these lovely British mammals!

Day 2:

What a super day! It was all focused around the elusive pine marten who has made its return back from the brink and found a home in Shropshire. We had an initial game to introduce the pine marten's feeding habits, stressing what versatile omnivores they are, followed by a ground art competition of the map

of the UK displaying the locations that martens are currently inhabiting. We introduced children to the idea of becoming scat enthusiasts by making natural playdough - scented with parma violets and dyed brown to reflect marten scat! - and went to town creating 'hip-wiggled' scat. And all finished off with whittling martens to take home - brilliant day! Many thanks to The Vincent Wildlife Trust for supplying pamphlets for the group to take home.

Day 3:

Our last day in the woods celebrated the role of death and decaying in the woodland environment - perfect samhain/Halloween theme! We talked about fungi, the role of mycelium in the ecosystem, and the abundance of critters that make dead wood their home. We specifically looked at the rare stag beetle and its need to live in dead wood for 5 years as a grub, to live for 4-6 weeks as a beetle. A revelation for many!

What the children said...



"I learn something new every time I come and it's all fun!"

"I wouldn't want to hurt or damage the environment now."

"I really liked coming. I never use to care about being outside and now I love it."

"I feel happy at the end of the day. I like that there's lots of information about the woods."

"I've really enjoyed learning about what pine martens are." (-Child who lives near Clunton Coppice, who feels much more connected to the space now she understands more about pine martens)

"It's hard to think about these things when you're so busy enjoying yourself in the moment."

Notes to the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund...

We would like to thank you for the support in making this project go ahead. The success was overwhelming, with the uptake of the sessions, the uptake of the volunteer opportunities, and the generosity of time offered by professionals and their resources, all exceeding our expectations. It was an incredibly enjoyable and satisfying project for the team to deliver, and we are very appreciative of the opportunity to execute such a successful project to our local community.

- Antonia Pettit, Company Director

**BRANCHING
OUT**

**FOREST SCHOOL &
SOCIAL FORESTRY**

FIND US : 07949 238269  

INFO@BRANCHINGOUTFORESTSCHOOL.COM

WWW.BRANCHINGOUTFORESTSCHOOL.COM