



Shropshire Myths, Legends & Folklore

Accessible Forest School
Holiday Club Sessions Project
Report

By Branching Out Forest School & Social
Forestry



2024

Project Summary



We welcomed in 74 individuals. The 2 free places per session, for low income households, were continuously utilised from a variety of local families, and the volunteer opportunities fulfilled too.

100% rated Branching Out Forest School sessions as ‘very good’



100% of parents said they felt their children had learnt something new from their sessions

100% reported their children had enjoyed their time in the woods ‘a lot’



95% of parents said they felt their children’s wellbeing improved from being outdoors

90% agreed that their children had become more enthused about the natural environment following the sessions



All parents agreed that the sessions provided a good service for the local community, with the subsidised places being beneficial for local families.

May/June Half-Term Sessions

Session Content: 'The Ellsemere Cuckoo' & Shropshire Birds & Red-List Birds; A Day with Shropshire Author & Storyteller, Amy Douglas



Birds, birds, birds...

Our first set of sessions welcomed in the brilliant and renowned local author and storyteller, Amy Douglas. Amy led a session in the woods which entailed a mixture of children being engrossed by Amy's stories and enjoying the activities she had set up which encouraged the children to explore the woodland and to foster creative thinking. Amy told the story of *The Stokesay Giants*, which got us thinking about ravens and the Corvid family, inspiring clay creations and lots of art with children making their own charcoal ink and paint, celebrating and learning about these highly intelligent birds.

We also welcomed in the first of our older 10-14 years old group. The children were a keen, enthusiastic group who enjoyed the

opportunity to deepen their ornithology knowledge. We focused on Shropshire species that are currently on the red list, discussing what such classifications mean and exploring the reasons why birds may have found themselves on such a list. A huge decline in insect numbers and habitat was a repeat subject, and related to our conservation activity for the day, where we built two new bird boxes for our woodland site: A Spotted Flycatcher open-fronted nest box, and an elongated box for the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, with a suitable log inside to meet the preferences of the woodpecker! The group even got enthused and put out watching poles around the Spotted Flycatcher box after they discovered the hunting habits of these amazing birds.

Summer Holiday Sessions

Session Content: 'The Bridgnorth Witch' & Local Conservation Charities; 'Crawls Meadow' & Shropshire Meadows Flora & Fauna

The story of 'The Bridgnorth Witch' is a wonderful tale that highlights not to judge a book by its cover, with a clear underlying message of a duty and responsibility to look after animals. With this in mind, we highlighted some of the local charities that do wonders for species found within Shropshire. Namely, The Butterfly Conservation Trust and their work for the Wood White butterfly, and Vincent Wildlife Trust and their work for Lesser Horseshoe bats at local bat sancturay, Cwm Cottage, and for pine martens. We continued to do our own good deeds and did some bracken-bashing and glade clearing to open more space in the woodland for butterflies and learnt about different woodland butterflies and caterpillars, with many thanks to Jenny Ogden from Wildlife Roleplay and her fabulous models. We were also fortunate to welcome Lucy and Katherine from Vincent Wildlife Trust who selected our site as a suitable pine marten nest box site for the new Martens on the Move project. They explained in depth about the illusive pine martens, and what the project entails and what the data is hoping to collect The group helped to carefully select a site for the box and hoist it into position. The camera trap is now being carefully monitored through our home-ed group!

A session was also based around 'Crawls Meadow', celebrating the amazing floran and fauna found within our Shropshire meadows. Jenny's models of bees were utilised here, inspiring the children's own bee puppets and masonry bee homes using hollowed elder branches for them to take home and put in their gardens. The children also learnt about Yellow Rattle and its role in developing grassland sites to meadows. With many thanks to local artist and naturalist Sarah Jameson for a supply of seed, the children got hands-on and made their own yellow rattle seed bombs with instructions form Sarah on how to germinate their seed bombs and grow their own yellow rattle.



Autumn Half Term Sessions

Session Content: 'The Fire of Wem' & Fire Skills; Shropshire Giants; A Visit from Jake Evans, Story Teller



Fires, giants and many, many tales...

Our older group got to enjoy the tale of the Fire of Wem, with much discussion over whether a string of 'coincidences' remains just that - coincidences - or could arguably be more. This topic led onto fire safety and our responsibilities when having fires in the woodland. It was a prime opportunity to discuss lurking dangers in a warming environment, and how we may need to change our practices to account for this with additional precautions for keeping the natural environment safe. We practiced making fires with a range of natural tinders, and the young people crafted their own leather tinder-collecting pouches. This brought in the subject of leather, and in particular, deer hide, and whether the the duty of managing woodlands accordingly for deer could be more sustainably approached by using deer hide for leathers in the UK.

The 6-12 years group enjoyed the topic of Shropshire Giants on Halloween, where we discussed the embedded characters of Shropshire hills with the legends of giants, in particular, the Wrekin and Norton Camp. Of course, being Samhain, we also discussed the importance of 'death' in a woodland and how decomposition represents the renurturing of our soil. Wildlife Roleplay's dung beetles were a superb tool to engage the children on the incredible creatures that we owe much thanks to, and the children then created their own dead hedge in omen to the decompositon process.

Jake Evans joined us on our last day in the woods, and what a sheer joy that was. He sung the praises of our small heroes in nature (worms!), and taught the children to embrace and face any fears - a challenge to hold your most disliked mini beast persued! He coaxed and nurtured creativity at all times, demonstrating how stories and our natural enviornment have consistently being intertwined, and will forever remain so.

Thank you again to the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust for the opportunity to inspire the next generation in connecting and caring for our Shropshire woodlands through play, art and wildlife education. The children, and our staff, have had a super time throughout 2024, with many memories made, friendships formed, and practical skills harboured. Thank you!

BRANCHING OUT

FOREST SCHOOL &
SOCIAL FORESTRY

FIND US : 07949 238269 @
INFO@BRANCHINGOUTFORESTSCHOOL.COM
WWW.BRANCHINGOUTFORESTSCHOOL.COM



BRANCHING
OUT
FOREST SCHOOL &
SOCIAL FORESTRY