

Bromley Biodiversity Plan 2015 – 2020

APPENDIX H:



Best Practice Guidelines for Schools

School grounds, teachers and pupils can make a very important contribution to Bromley's biodiversity. School grounds can provide habitats for wildlife which can become a teaching aide for inspiring a new generation. These guidelines aim to outline how schools can improve their grounds for wildlife and maximise their use as an education resource.

Why should schools improve their biodiversity management?

- Because it helps meet the objectives relating to the environment and sustainability as required by the National Curriculum.
- Because it gives pupils the opportunity to appreciate wildlife and better understand the world in which they live.
- Because it improves the environment of the school grounds and therefore the workplace.
- Because it improves biodiversity for everyone in the borough.
- Because it helps to protect the future of wildlife in the region.



How to get started

The points below can be useful cross-curricular learning activities throughout the school.

- Get to know your site first. Any open space can have value for wildlife. You may already have features within your school grounds that are wildlife-friendly. Walk around the grounds and look at what you already have – any grassland, scrub, trees or a pond?
- See if you can find anything out about the land history. What was the land used for before it was built on? Was it woodland or grazing land for example? This could tell you a lot about the sort of wildlife that would naturally occur.
- What sort of soil do you have? Is it chalky, acid or clay?
- Check for any Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) that may have been put on significant trees.
- Find out if your school grounds incorporate or are adjacent to a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) – see **Appendices A & B**.
- Some species are protected by law. If you find evidence of bats, great crested newts, adders or dormice, please seek further advice – see **Section 4. Protected Species in Bromley**.



Habitat Creation in School Grounds

One of the easiest ways to improve your school's biodiversity is to create areas for wildlife within your grounds. The work does not need to be expensive or complicated to add significant wildlife value.

Examples of the types of habitat you could create include:

Hedgerows Create a hedgerow by planting a line of sapling trees (known as whips). The trees should be of locally sourced native species such as hawthorn, dogwood, hazel, beech, alder, buckthorn and field maple. Hedgerows provide a habitat for many species. For more information about hedgerows see **Section 3.3. Habitats; Hedgerows**

Ponds A pond should be at least 500mm in depth and have a staggered bank to allow wildlife to easily get in and out and to provide different depths of water for invertebrates. Ponds should not be stocked with fish. If you want to add plants to your pond, they must be native species that have been sourced locally. It is important to check to make **absolutely certain** that alien plants such as New Zealand pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*), Parrot's Feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*), water fern (*Azolla filiculoides*) or any other invasive water plant are not introduced since these are extremely difficult to eradicate once they are in your pond. Allow the pond to fill naturally with rain water – if a top up is required, try to collect rainwater rather than using artificial water sources. Do not attempt to bring in amphibians from garden ponds. Frogs and toads will colonise a new pond without help. For more information see **Section 3.6 Habitats; Wetland**.

Wildflower Meadows To create a successful wildflower meadow, it is important that the soil is low in nutrients. This often means removing the top soil if you are using a unwanted corner of the school field. Wildflowers can be planted from seed, but if you are buying a meadow seed mix, ensure that it is appropriate for your soil type and locality. If possible, try to source wildflower seed locally, such as hay cropped from a nearby meadow (this will require permission from the landowner). For more information, see **Section 3.4 Habitats; Grasslands**.

Woodland or Scrub Corners If you only have a small corner of the playing field available, consider planting local native tree and shrub species of local provenance in it. Native plants support more invertebrates than non-native species, providing food for other invertebrates, birds and bats. Trees and shrubs also provide food and shelter for birds and small mammals. For more information, see **Section 3.7 Habitats; Scrub**.

Bees & Butterfly Gardens This can be done even in schools with very limited outside space. Plants which provide nectar and pollen for a wide range of bees, butterflies and other invertebrates can be planted in window boxes, hanging baskets plant pots or raised beds - wherever there is some space. Many of these plants would also be suitable for a sensory garden.

Stag Beetle Loggery Stag beetles are widespread in Bromley, although scarce

elsewhere. Stag beetle larvae spend most of their lives underground eating rotten wood. To create habitat for stag beetles, 'plant' some old logs vertically into the ground, so that they are half-submerged. You can also bury piles of wood chippings. Log piles will provide a home for many other invertebrates as well as stag beetles.

Further reading: London Wildlife Trust; Wildlife Gardening Guides (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/wildlife-gardening-guides>)

Managing School Grounds with Biodiversity in Mind

The way school grounds are maintained is often a limiting factor when it comes to biodiversity. Some simple changes to the way your grounds are managed could greatly improve your site for wildlife.

- Landscaping - try to set some areas aside for wildlife within the context of any landscaping. For example, leave a strip of grass to grow long, only cutting once a year. Leave an 'untidy' area of scrub. Include 'buffer zones' of long grass or scrub around habitat features such as ponds or trees.
- Create or maintain linear features within the landscape, e.g. hedgerows and strips of long grass. Use them to connect existing habitat areas. They will act as wildlife corridors.
- Planting – only use native species for planting that are locally sourced. Local wildlife will be adapted to these flowers and plants.
- Incorporate wildlife-friendly features around the school buildings, such as bird and bat boxes.
- When herbicides have to be used, use only biodegradable, systemic herbicides which should ideally be applied using spot treatment methods.
- Use only peat-free composts.

Further Reading: Learning through Landscapes <http://ltl.org.uk/>

Using the Outdoor Environment as a Teaching Resource

There are many ways in which you can use the outdoor environment as a teaching resource. Habitats created for the benefit of wildlife can also be used for education activities.

- Hedgerows – bird watching, plant identification and bug hunts.
- Ponds – pond dipping
- Wildflower Meadows – plant identification, bug hunts.
- Bee & Butterfly Gardens – gardening, sensory trails, bug hunts.



- Woodland – bug hunts, bush crafts, den-building
- Forest Schools – Forest School is a popular new initiative for outdoor learning. However, if you are considering setting up your own Forest School in your local area, consider carefully the site you choose to use. Forest School should not be carried out on ancient woodland or other sensitive habitats as trampling will cause a loss of ground flora that may not be recoverable.

BEECHE – Bromley’s Environmental Education Centre at High Elms

BEECHE offers a wide range of CPD courses, run either at BEECHE or on-site at your school. Courses aim to train (and encourage) teachers to use the outdoor environment as a teaching resource. They also offer Forest School training for teachers interested in leading their own Forest School groups.



BEECHE can also offer further advice on setting up and maintaining a wildlife area in your school grounds.

BEECHE also provides curriculum-based environmental education activities for schools led by qualified teaching staff.

For current prices and bookings please ring 01689 860571 or email environmental-education.bromley@thelandscapegroup.co.uk