

The Great Woodland Detectives

Enhancing understanding of local habitats at Ffyndoune Community College, Co. Durham

Aim

1. Raise awareness of the natural environment that students live in.
2. Stimulate students' imagination and engage them in learning that will further their understanding and appreciation of natural issues.
3. Create an opportunity for young people to take ownership of learning

Action

We created resources to facilitate a woodland survey of flora and fauna within the school site.

Outcome

Students gained a detailed understanding of the local natural environment, and felt a strong sense of ownership of both their learning and their local wild habitat.



Wooden tree identification plaques



Plaster of Paris animal footprint moulds

Details

Background about the school:

We are a small secondary school in County Durham. We are fortunate to have a large school site of around 35 acres, some of which is wild and uncultivated. We have sustainability as a core ethos and actively support students in engaging with, protecting and understanding the natural habitats that exist locally.

Growing Schools Case Studies



Why initiated?

We felt that the wild parts of the school site were an underused resource, and were keen to use them to enhance and improve the curriculum. Students too felt that the site offered lots of opportunities to learn which they wanted to exploit and enjoy.

How learning was organised:

The activity had 2 distinct parts:

- (i) identify animal tracks and
- (ii) identify species of trees.

We created plaster of Paris moulds of a cavity of animal footprints which the woodland detectives took rubbings of on paper. They then used their rubbings to track down real footprints in the woods.

We created leaf-identification plaques from wood. These were placed in the woods in the vicinity of the correct species. The detectives had to find them and use them to identify the 16 different species of tree in the area.

Finally, the detectives used the leaves they had collected to create a large collage, showing which species of trees live locally. This can be adapted for older students, who would produce identification keys as part of the KS4 syllabus.

What would we do differently? For some of the larger groups of students, we would make sure there were more identification plaques to collect – perhaps four of each species, as the students found this part of the project really enjoyable.

Measure of achievement Following the project, all the students completed a leaf identification quiz, and all were able to identify at least ten different tree species.

Curriculum links

KS2 Scientific investigation

KS3 Science – Animals and Habitats (feeding relationships)

KS4 BTEC Science

Applied Science Module 5 Biological Systems

Strand 2 Ecology

Students' quotes

'I didn't realize there was that many different types of trees!' KS4 student

'I enjoyed searching for the animal tracks – I was really pleased when I found a badger footprint.' KS3 student

'I like being in the woods 'cos we learn about wild things.' Year 6 student

