



Final Project Evaluation Report

January 2018

Final Project Evaluation - Executive Summary

Blackdown Hills Natural Futures (BHNF) has been an exceptional project which will continue to have an influence in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and beyond for years to come. It provides clear evidence of outstanding outcomes for natural heritage, individuals and communities.

Evaluation participants were full of praise for the project, which was blessed with remarkably skilled staff who worked seamlessly alongside a highly accomplished team of commissioned specialists, delivering a project of outstanding quality. Not everything worked, but lessons were learnt and built upon. In many ways the figures speak for themselves.

- **3470** participants directly engaged through events, talks and activities programme
- **150** sites surveyed and **1000's** of new wildlife records submitted
- **400+** volunteer days contributed through dormouse monitoring programme alone
- **63** events and training workshops delivered
- Over **1000** children and **50** teaching staff engaged in wildlife education activities through **24** school visits
- All **9** trainees entered employment in the sector within a few months of completing placements
- **100%** participant enjoyment rate for 2017 events (98% over 3 years)
- **93%** of participants knowledge and understanding of local wildlife improved
- **71%** of participants given confidence to start identifying and recording wildlife
- **13,300** website users, totalling almost **43,000** page views
- **111** hours of support to Community Nature Projects

The project focused on legacy and succession from the beginning. This report is brimming with examples of this. For many, the 100's of young lives that were thrilled and inspired by the project will be the greatest legacy of all.

The project has been described as a 'game changer' in terms of its influence. The project, greatly aided by the discovery the UK's first recorded black dormouse, helped put the Blackdown Hills on the national stage.

BHNF has created a huge opportunity to develop further. The greatest threat to this legacy is complacency. The risks faced by the Blackdown Hills natural heritage remain immense. The challenge now is for the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership to seize this opportunity, to build on the undoubted success of the project and to achieve even greater heights.

The 24th November 2022 will mark the Fifth anniversary of the closing celebration event for the BHNF Project. It will provide an invaluable opportunity for stakeholders to assess the longer-term impact of the project and to see whether these opportunities have indeed been seized. So, mark the date!

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Blackdown Hills Nature Futures Evaluation: 2015-2017

1. Introduction

Blackdown Hills Nature Futures (BHNF) is a three-year project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and hosted by the Blackdown Hills AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) Partnership. BHNF aims to 'bring about a step-change in the future of the area's natural heritage' by encouraging people to '*Discover it, Share it and Do it*'. Through this it seeks positive outcomes for the natural heritage, people and the wider community. This document is a culmination of evaluation across all three years.

2. Methodology used

Over 30 interviews were conducted with event participants, land owners, community nature project coordinators, trainers and trainees. These interviews were supplemented by attendance at events, online surveys, event feedback forms, project documentation and discussions with the BHNF project team. The methodology and report is far from exhaustive, however, it does highlight the impact of the project on the three key areas; natural heritage, people, and the wider community. It looks at legacy and provides some conclusions, 'lessons learned' and recommendations for the future. Please see appendix 1 for more detail.

3. What difference has BHNF made for natural heritage (Project Outcome 1)

Identification and recording

"The survey work carried out by the project and the trainees has had a valuable effect in bringing up to date and extending the ecological knowledge of a number of wildlife sites across the AONB"

The identification and recording of the Blackdown Hills natural heritage has been a key part of the BHNF Project. Interviewees spoke highly about the value of the surveying that had been undertaken. The data collection has led to a far better understanding of the sites. More than 150 sites have been surveyed during the project and these surveys have produced thousands of records. BHNF has

worked closely with the County Wildlife Recording Offices and demonstrated the value and importance of collecting and sharing natural heritage data with the communities they are working with. A number of rare finds were also recorded including Boeninghausen's Sedge (new to Somerset) and a black dormouse (first record for the UK!).

Increased monitoring

BHNF has undoubtedly facilitated links that have encouraged surveying of sites within the Blackdown Hills. One land manager highlighted how:

"The project (BHNF) has made a huge difference. There had been no systematic monitoring in the last 10 years of the site. The project (BHNF) has been particularly successful in developing a partnership with the local community to help monitor our site".

Improved Natural Heritage management and condition of sites

The combination of site surveys, training days, access to experts and ongoing advice provided by BHNF continues to be a powerful model. Many of those interviewed spoke with passion about what had been discovered through the site surveys and the advice they had received.

“It (BHNF) has created so many benefits for me, the farm and the family. The success should be shouted from the rooftops!”

“Our field is living proof that they (BHNF) are making a huge difference to local wildlife”

“The production of a professional management plan has enabled us to move forward in effective habitat management for Wildlife”

New and strengthened partnerships

BHNF excelled in bringing together key stakeholders, often on site. It was a ‘winning combination’ that enabled ‘collective thinking’ regarding site management, made possible by having species experts, landowners and members of the public present.

In conjunction with the surveying were practical conservation training days. This enabled people to have a greater understanding of sites, along with the skills and confidence to manage and improve them. Interviewees reported how *“over 70 hours of scrub clearance had now been carried out, thanks to the momentum of BHNF”*.

Greater financial stability and resilience

“The management plan allowed us to transform some derelict land into a wildlife habitat (especially for pollinators). The land will be managed long term with potential to transform other areas. This will derive from my new skills in applying for grants and managing land”.

Interviewees spoke of the knowledge and support they had gained from BHNF, equipping them to apply for funding such as Countryside Stewardship. Others had been successfully supported to apply for money from the likes of the Borough Council, Tesco community funds, whilst others benefited from planning 106 agreements. Wildlife groups had recruited new paying members and private businesses were seeing the value of enhanced habitats on their land.

Evidence based approach

The professionalism and expertise of the project team inspired action. Interviewees spoke of *‘the validity’* the BHNF project team gave to proposals and ideas. This was often a vital constituent in transforming ideas into reality.

“We are just well-meaning amateurs. They brought validity to our project. They really gave us confidence and brought a sheen of professionalism to our work”

Innovative interpretation: A digital legacy

"The project (BHNF) has been invaluable in overcoming some initial pessimism and negativity in the wider community".

Evaluation respondents referred to usefulness of and the resources available on the BHNF website. Mention was particularly made of the interpretive film clips developed with ecologists and other specialists. These were seen as an empowering resource that would continue to enable the management of the AONB's natural heritage long after lottery funding came to an end.

4. What difference has BHNF made for people (Project Outcome 2)

Fun and enjoyable

A clear message from all those interviewed was how much fun their engagement with the project had been. 100 % of responses to the feedback forms stated they enjoyed the event they had attended. Several of the telephone interviewees referred to the success BHNF activities had had with engaging families and children. This was rewarding and inspiring for all concerned. To take one of many quotes from the project feedback forms:

The sense of fun, enjoyment and inspiration clearly comes over in the Wordle, which was created from telephone interviewee responses.

"I can't praise David Allen (BHNF tutor) and his partner enough for sharing their knowledge and expertise and arming myself and the family with tools to enable us to identify fungi. When I told our two children what we were going to do on Saturday morning they looked at me with disgust and my daughter told me that I was silly. By the end of the foray my daughter was asking if we could do more. My son and daughter are 10 and 9 respectively and David and his partner inspired them to explore and interrogate the landscape around them. A wonderful experience for the whole family."

Telephone Interviewees Wordle.



(Telephone interviewees were asked to provide three adjectives, positive or negative, to describe their experience of the project. These were then fed into the Wordle computer programme, <http://www.wordle.net/>, with the words used most frequently being the most dominant visually).

Exemplary practice

“Child friendly but also nerdy enough for adults”

The feedback on the activities delivered by BHNF was exemplary. Feedback demonstrated how activities were remarkably inclusive, well managed, varied and blessed with inspiring trainers.

Digging deeper and further

The activities encouraged individuals to explore further and to ‘dig deeper’ and to share their new-found skills and confidence. It is clear that BHNF has enabled people to *‘Discover it, Share it and Do it’*.

“I really enjoyed the bee course. I have made my garden bee friendly. Friends have started showing an interest and copying some of the things I have been doing in the garden”

“I live a mile down the road but I didn’t know this footpath existed at all. We will be coming back next week”

“I have just started my own plant discovery journey. I have been passing on my new found knowledge to other people. Informally pointing out things to friends”

Skills and training

“Hedgelaying course has enabled me to maintain my hedges for the benefit of the AONB”

Online surveys conducted over the course of the project consistently recorded high percentages for skills and learning. For example, 83% of questionnaire respondents had learnt a new skill through their engagement with BHNF, whilst 93% had learnt more about

the Blackdown Hills wildlife.

The new skills and confidence acquired due to BHNF that evaluation participants highlighted were widely varied. They included hedge laying, information technology, developing constitutions and writing funding applications. Interviewees gave witness to the fact that engagement with BHNF inspired them to access further long term more detailed courses.

“My plant Identification skills have dramatically improved ...additionally, skills have been developed in a wide variety of ecology departments, for example, small mammal handling and surveying, report writing, reptile surveying, client liaison and communication, bird identification, bat ecology and much more. The diversity of training on offer is amazing, and if there is something else we would like to do the staff (BHNF) would organise it and make it happen”!

Trainees set for life

The skills and confidence gained is probably best typified by the traineeships offered by BBNF. BBNF offered traineeships to people hoping to move into the ecology and conservation sector. In total nine un-paid positions were offered between April and September each year. The training scheme provided trainee ecologists with a wide variety of directly employable experience, the core emphasis of the programme being on building skills requested by employers in the sector. All the trainees secured employment or paid study opportunities within the environmental sector within a few months of completing their placements. **BBNF trainees are now working for leading organisations including; Natural England, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Devon Wildlife Trust, Freshwater Habitats Trust and The National Trust.** Many of the trainees spoke of the wider confidence and skills they had gained.

Traineeships

“I became more confident in my abilities throughout the project which has had a positive impact on not just my work, but also my personal life”

“The traineeship gave me an invaluable foundation for my present position in a busy wildlife consultancy. I now work with a portfolio of clients from the initial phone call right through to the invoicing. I am progressing towards being an Associate in my company and through the various level of CIEEM (The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management). The traineeship gave me the skills and confidences to do that”

“Through the traineeship I gained many skills that have helped me in my career. After the traineeship I worked for a local authority, a job I would not have got without the traineeship. Working on the district licensing strategy for GCNs was helped through the knowledge and experience I gained relating to newt surveys. Organising the team's consultancy work and carrying out GCN, bat, phase 1 and reptile surveys was aided by the protected species and preliminary ecological assessment training with BBNF. Amending LWS citations would have taken a lot longer without the better grasp I now have of botanical latin. The traineeship was particularly useful in obtaining my current position as Conservation Officer with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust. The experience of carrying out Local Wildlife Site surveys and the high level botanical training has enabled me to work in this role.”



Please see **appendix II** for a full Traineeship case study.

Work and Employment

A number of individuals directly related their employment and ongoing professional development to BBNF. There was clear evidence that many of these skills and talents remained local to the AONB.

“I attended a 'winter twig ID' course which has helped me in my current role as an ecologist working in the Blackdown Hills area”

“I learnt skills that are applicable and valued by new employer”

“The training I received through the project (BBNF) definitely helped me to gain my present post”

“I have gained confidence and knowledge working with dormice, and will be able to apply for my licence soon, thus helping with my career as an ecologist”



Health and wellbeing

A cross cutting theme for many of the participants was improved physical health and wellbeing and the accessibility of many of the activities on offer. This work sits well with the Somerset's AONB Nature and Wellbeing Project.

“It's just a really healthy way to spend a day”

“I'm not into scrub bashing any more but this surveying really suits me and gets me out”

“All sorts of people visit the site now, children feed the ducks and elderly enjoy the peace and tranquillity and some go there for their lunch”

5. What difference has BBNF made for communities (Project Outcome 2)

Inspiring public events

Over three years BBNF has delivered over 60 events and training days attracting over 2500 people - a remarkable achievement. These were extremely well received with exceptional feedback from feedback forms and telephone interviews. A definite highlight was the three Wildlife Discovery Days. Appendix IV provides analysis of four of these events with recommendations for the future.

Wildlife Discovery day



The annual Wildlife Discovery day was the flagship event for the Project. The days became hugely popular with the public, venues, volunteers and local wildlife groups, attracting many hundreds, massively exceeding the total three-year target of 60 participants. It presented the project with organisational headaches and opportunities in equal measure.

The days were centred around the commonly used 'Bioblitz' concept (www.bnhc.org.uk). Wildlife experts and organisations provided activities

"10/10. A free day out, somewhere I have never been. friendly faces, questions answered and coffee and cake. Couldn't be better. If this happens every year we will come!"

to inspire attendees to identify as many wildlife species as possible in a given area and time. Different venues were used each year in order to move around the area, attract new audiences, and to cope with ever expanding numbers.



"We've had a brilliant day. My two girls loved the mammal walk and river dipping in particular. Really well organised and lots to do! Thank you"

Please see **appendix III** for a full analysis of this event.

Empowered Community Nature Projects

BHNF has supported 17 Community Nature Projects (CNP's) across the Blackdown Hills to look after wildlife and care for community spaces. These ranged from churchyard groups to local Primary schools. Much of this support was delivered by contractors Clarity CIC (Community Interest Company). This external project 'capacity' helped build extra support for the Community Nature Projects and was held in very high regard. 91% of CNP's rated the support they had received as 'very good' and felt 'well supported' (online questionnaire).

The Community Nature Projects in numbers

- 17 groups of people with patches of land were supported, and connected to each other.
- 8 management plans were developed for their sites
- 11 groups were supported to gain grants/funding for their local spaces
- 8 groups had site based training sessions for their own volunteers (and sometimes other CNP groups) – identifying bats or birds, hedge laying, scything, moth trapping and more
- 3 training sessions were put on for groups: using social media, planting wildflower meadows, managing ponds
- 4 groups had regular support from NCV's (Neroche Conservation Volunteers) team of volunteers
- 3 events were run to bring people together
- 10 volunteers on average per CNP



CNP evaluation

- 82 % of CNP's reported the overall awareness of their site had increased among the local community
- 73% had seen an increase in volunteer numbers since engaging with BHNF
- 73% stated the support provided through BHNF help them secure grants or funding for their project (excluding AONB 'SDF' or BHNF project funding)?
(Results from online survey of CNP's)

CNP's felt stronger and better equipped in terms of skills, volunteers, legal structures and finances:

With your Blackdown Hills AONB Natural Futures funding now coming to an end, I thought I would write to let you know what a difference it has made to us at Offwell Woodland & Wildlife Trust. The courses you ran were both informative and enjoyable, but the support and input we received has enabled us to develop and move forward at a time when we were seriously considering the future of the Trust.

I have met with Jenny on a monthly basis and she has acted as a great source of advice and guidance, and a valuable sounding board as we considered the way forward. With her support and BHNF funding we have set up a new website, created a Facebook page, and established a good productive working relationship with both East Devon Countryside Services and the Forestry Commission. We have also started on the process of working with local primary schools to build on the excellent relationship we have with Offwell Primary. When Jenny and myself visited the Head Teacher at Offwell at the end of last year I made a note of some of her comments, which I have included below.

"Our welly walks in Offwell Woods are at the heart of enjoyment of Primary School life for both children and families. Having access to the woodland classroom and toilets has revolutionised our opportunities to expand our curriculum learning. The woods are a huge source of inspiration to our children, and our high academic standards are in a large way due to our visits to the woods".

With support from Jenny and funding from BHNF we now have a comprehensive management plan and have re-established good relationships with Natural England. With her guidance and expertise, we have also advertised for, and will soon be appointing, two new trustees.

Jenny's support and encouragement has enabled us to move forward, celebrate what has been achieved, and look to a positive future where the woodlands play a key role in the wider community's enjoyment of the natural world.



Improved access and facilities

"From zero we now have 20 plus people enjoying it every day!... It has become a real venue for learning and exploration"

"The terrace outside the day care room was used in-frequently. Now people take the opportunity to sit outside and enjoy the flowers, or potter doing some gardening. It has increased the interaction of our older members with the outside space. Thank you!"

"The local community now feels welcome at the site. The local school is using the woodlands Lakeside Classroom on a weekly basis and local groups are using the site as a resource"

"It allows some locals who were previously not engaged or benefiting from the site to come...they feel valued and have got to know others in the village"

"We've gone from a building site spoil field to a community space with plants, trees, allotments, shelter, sports equipment, paths, carpark, bug hotel and an owl box!"

"It has been very powerful. People coming together, working together focusing on the Blackdown's wildlife"

I didn't know the Blackdown Hills very well. This is a whole new area opened up" (Barnstaple)

It was clear through the telephone interviews and online surveys that, as a result of the efforts of the Community Nature Projects, greater numbers of the general public are accessing wildlife areas on their door step and celebrating the area's wildlife. 100% of CNP's reported the condition of their site had improved, whilst 73% had seen an increase in the number of people using their site.



Community Cohesion; bringing people together



What is more, BDNF, along with the CNP's, have helped facilitate a sense of community, of people coming together in their locality; often in a way they had not done so for some time.

Businesses enhanced. New visitors attracted

A number of businesses which engaged with the evaluation certainly felt their 'offer' had been improved by working with BDNF, in terms of their wildlife credentials. Furthermore, many participants spoke of how BDNF events had attracted them to the area, many spoke of returning again for longer, residential, stays.

“BHNF have been outstanding in their support, advice and helping to run various activities over the past three years. Our community space would be all the poorer without their input and they will have certainly left our community a better place for all their efforts”

Pupils, teachers, schools inspired and equipped

The Blackdown Hills Natural Futures (BHNF) primary school environmental education programme, delivered by contractor Catherine Farnell, worked with 12 different primary schools and with over 50 teaching staff and volunteers over two years. An incredible 1000 school children were engaged through 24 sessions; hugely exceeding the pupil target of 600. These outdoor sessions were based on the *five types of habitat in the Blackdown Hills*, namely; heathland, meadows, woodlands and hedgerows, mires and bogs, rivers and ponds. The feedback from these sessions was incredibly powerful.

All the teaching staff that completed the questionnaire either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that:

- *The activities have improved my knowledge and understanding of the wildlife at our school and the Blackdown Hills.*
- *I am likely to use the natural environment as a teaching resource.*
- *After today's activities, I will continue to deliver similar environmental sessions or arrange outdoor wildlife activities.*



“I’d never heard of the Blackdown Hills before and I really liked learning about it”.

Membury School, Key Stage 2 pupil

“I learnt there are 5 types of habitat in the Blackdown Hills and I enjoyed the bug hunt”.

All Saints School, Year 5 pupil

“I learnt that there were lots of amazing wildlife in school and favourite find was the pill woodlouse”.

Buckland St Mary School, Year 5 pupil

Several schools have further developed their wildlife areas. For example, Hemyock primary school has applied for a grant to develop the decking around the school pond to make it safe and accessible for the children.

*A bespoke evaluation was carried out for this work which can be found in **appendix V***

Hemyock Primary School

Hemyock Primary School was actively involved with the project. It was identified that there was a pond on the school grounds which was rarely accessible to pupils as it was not used by the teachers. As a result, the first session run at the school focused on the pond. Across the day, five classes took part in pond dipping and developing the wildlife area around the pond. A hibernaculum, bug hotel, and bee homes were created and wildflower seeds sown. The day was very successful and engaged and enthused both pupils and teachers about the potential of using the pond area more regularly.



During the second year, the focus changed from reaching as many children as possible to concentrating on one class and giving them a more in-depth experience. The activities centered around a BioBlitz of the school, letting the pupils explore and identify as many species as possible.

Having worked with the school over the two years, the school have fully embraced developing the pond and wildlife area of the school grounds. To ensure children can regularly take part in pond dipping, the school applied for a Blackdown Hills Sustainable Development Fund grant to replace the decking area around the pond and the work is scheduled to take place in early 2018.

Abstract from schools case studies. Please see full version in appendix.

Awesome art

The environment education ran alongside a BHNH school art project, delivered through a contract by Daisi (Devon Arts in Schools Initiative) This aimed to create a public artistic display and exhibition, that would deepen, support and celebrate the learning of local children in 5 selected habitats, unique to the Blackdown Hills.

The nine schools had access to a printing workshop that focused on specific elements from a given habitat which had been introduced in a previous session by the environmental education consultant.



Five schools were able to host an extra whole day workshop, developing and creating the final panels for the public exhibition. Again, the feedback was exceptional:

"I liked working with Monica because I learned loads of things about nature. I enjoyed making all the prints and learned lots of different art techniques. When I saw the panel at the end it felt like I was actually there"

Rosie, yr 3



"Fabulous exhibition! The school children have produced some fantastic work which really captures the beauty of the Blackdown Hills".

Exhibition visitor



"As a Primary School and Forest School teacher I believe it is really important for the children to connect with their environment...the work they did with Monica was very motivating for them and the buzz in the classroom was contagious, the final product was absolutely amazing and I am so proud of what the children have accomplished, I can't wait to see all the panels together."

Awliscombe Primary School teacher

'A Collage of the Blackdown Hills'



Heathland

Meadows

Mires and Bogs

Some of the exhibition panels produced by schools

*A bespoke evaluation report was carried out for this work which can be found in the **appendix VII***

A raised profile for wildlife and the AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

“The type of activities offered and promoted by the project have been real and tangible enough to make a positive impact on local people’s consciousness... increased recognition of the AONB and the wildlife related interests it is promoting”

The discovery of the first ever UK black dormice gave the Blackdown Hills a national and indeed international media profile. The AONB team were adept at leaving no stone unturned when it came to publicity. The evaluation highlighted a plethora of methods used, including; twitter, Facebook, Parish newsletters, village notice boards and school bags. All raising the profile of wildlife and the AONB.

6. Legacy

Evaluation participants clearly testified to the profound positive impact of BHNF on individuals, groups, communities and habitats across the Blackdown Hills. When evaluation participants were asked “*whether they felt the BHNF legacy would still be evident in 5 years*” there was a wholehearted “Yes”, or indeed “Yes, bloody yes”. The project is littered with examples of legacy, however, three specific areas stand out.

A generation of Blackdown Hills Ecologists



The BBNF project engaged with many hundreds of children through its event and schools' programme. In particular, the investment in skills for teaching staff and wildlife features in the school grounds must augur well for the future success of the work beyond Lottery funding. Furthermore, the value of the work has been recognised by the AONB and additional funding has been accessed to continue this work in 2018. Many of the evaluation respondents felt this work would probably be the greatest legacy of the project.

Stronger, sustainable community groups

Community Nature Projects were a key way that BBNF aimed to bring about a 'step change in the future of the area's natural heritage' and this has occurred in abundance. The capacity building support received has created a network of empowered, better equipped groups. The statistics further draw this out.

Empowered CNP's

- 82 % The support and expert/specialist advice had helped to develop a long-term management plan for their site
- 82 % felt their project was in a better position long term thanks to BBNF
- 66 % felt confident in applying for grants/generating income thanks to support from the BBNF
- 55 % felt the support provided through BBNF helped generate new/extra income for their site or project (e.g. membership fees)

Responses from online survey and telephone interviews.

"We have had grants from Tesco's, Wessex Water, the Parish, charity donations, the AONB. Raised £500 plus through a fund-raising quiz and have set up a Friends of scheme with other over 50 members donating £10 a year to be Members"

"The support received has been invaluable at a key point in the life of the Charity. Advice and BBNF funding has enabled us to produce a professional management plan which has met a key aspect in continuing Natural England Funding. Guidance in updating the Trust website has also been invaluable along with training for myself in various aspects of conservation management. Overall support from BBNF has played a key role in moving the Charity forward and enabling us to rebuild relationships with partners, neighbours and the wider conservation community"

The Survey Legacy

Evaluation respondents highlighted the value of the new and equipped surveyors and the species records created by the Project in terms of legacy. For example, watercourse surveying has led to a one-year Crayfish project, which has already attracted £80k in funding with further expansion planned. Work with landowners provided the cornerstone of a bid to Natural England for continued work with the farming community that resulted in a facilitation fund project running for the next three years.



The projects highly successful hazel dormouse monitoring initiative, linked to the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP), is yet another superb example of the legacy being left by the project. BNHF leaves as a legacy 30+ new volunteers surveying 300 new nest

boxes at five new monitoring sites. Volunteers have been supported to gain their dormice handling licenses and will continue to work under the auspices of the newly refreshed Somerset Mammal Group – the revival of this group was initiated by the BNHF Officer and project funding was allocated to help the group restart. The telephone interviewees could not speak highly enough of the support they had received from BNHF and they had confidence that the surveying would continue for many years to come.

7. Lessons learned

A well-respected hosting organisation: Having the BNHF based with the AONB brought kudos and a steady hand to the project.

A robust AONB: The project was described as a ‘game changer’ and ‘hugely significant’ in raising the profile of the AONB to individuals, landowners, community groups and the wider public in the Blackdown Hills. The AONB itself gained new skills, insights and confidence through hosting the project.

“We changed our way of working”.

Dedicated, skilled and passionate staff: This was the single most important ‘success factor’ that evaluation respondents listed. Time and effort spent on recruitment can reap massive dividends.

Consultants and specialist services: BNHF commissioned a number of organisations and individuals to deliver specific services. Evaluation respondents and BNHF staff

spoke highly of consultants and the seamless service that they received from the different providers and BHNH. Commissioning respected well-known local bodies that were able to hit the ground running greatly added to the capacity and effectiveness of the Project.

Digital challenges: Creating accessible, appropriate resources for smart phones remains challenging and is resource hungry. Time is better spent on the likes of Facebook and twitter.

Evaluation: Evaluation, internal and external, from day one, was at the heart of the project with the staff team and steering group responsive to findings.

A flexible supportive funder: The Lottery were consistently responsive to the evident changing needs of the project. This enabled the project to thrive.

Getting the pace right: It is a fine balance to allow communities to go at an appropriate pace whilst making them aware of time restricted opportunities.

A winning combination: Dedicated staff, commissioned specialist services, a bespoke and flexible funding pot and online support was a winning combination highly valued by evaluation respondents.

Free learning experiences: Not everything worked! Don't panic, just reflect, learn and move on.

Unexpected Outcomes: Expect the unexpected. The project was littered with unexpected positive consequences. For example, the older people group who created their own art exhibition after being inspired by the work of the school children.

Legacy and succession: Legacy and succession planning was key from day one. The Project Steering group oversaw this.

8. Recommendations

The evaluation reports for years one and two gave some challenging recommendations. It was gratifying for evaluation participants that BHNH had carefully considered these recommendations and taken action. In this final year the evaluation makes the following recommendations:

Twelve-month review

Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership to review the transition period. Has the BHNH website been merged successfully with the AONB one? Have volunteers been 'handed over' to the AONB Volunteer Officer or partner organisations such as the Somerset Mammal Group successfully.

Community Nature Projects

The CNP's punch massively above their weight. The capacity building support they received was invaluable. The evaluation found that many of these groups had even bigger and bolder aspirations for their local habitats and communities, but recognised that this would need new skills and confidence. The CNP's were full of praise for the

BHNF and the AONB. The Blackdowns would be well served to do everything within its powers to continue to enable and 'tool up' these groups to the next level. There is a huge opportunity and challenge here.

Land owners support

BHNF surveyed over 150 sites and generated a huge amount of good will from landowners, almost from a standing start. The evaluation highlighted:

- 88% requesting follow up wildlife surveys
- 75% seeking further advice workshops
- 69% keen to receive regular e- news/ newsletters from the AONB

The successful Natural England Facilitation Fund programme application is now key to providing this support and it is recommended that the opportunities it presents are opened up to as many as possible. again here, the online resources developed by BHNF will be invaluable. it would be a tragedy if this ground swell of good will was not seized upon by the AONB and its partners; particularly as it was so hard won.

Young lives

The BHNF education work has changed young lives. It was inspiring, enabling and literally grounded in the Blackdown Hills. The AONB is to be congratulated on the seed corn funding to continue this outreach work. There is clear evidence of the transformation effect of this work. Partners and funders need to 'come to the party' and support this.

The Blackdown Wildlife Forum

Many involved in the evaluation referred to the value of networking. Other protected landscapes have found value in annually/ bi annually bringing stakeholders together to hear about new opportunities, findings and discoveries. A potential model maybe the Exmoor Wildlife Forum (<http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/about-us/press-room/press-room/news-2015/celebrating-exmoors-wildlife>)

Mark the date: 24/11/2022

The impact of the BHNF has been immense, however, the ultimate test of the value of the BHNF will be in the legacy it leaves. The 24th November 2022 will mark the Fifth anniversary of the closing celebration event for the project. Bringing together key stakeholders, volunteers, partner organisations and the trainee alumni for a simple focused workshop over lunch, perhaps followed with a visit to a Community Nature Partnership, could provide invaluable insight into the true effects of BHNF.

Conclusion



The Project hugely exceeded all its targets and was delivered to the highest standard. This evaluation found that it had a real and tangible impact on natural heritage, individuals and communities in the Blackdown Hills that far exceeded all expectations and it will be sorely missed.

1000's of new wildlife records have been collected, 100's of young lives inspired and 8 individuals can directly link their employment to their BHNF traineeship. Furthermore, the skilled and dedicated staff team did everything within their powers to leave a strong and healthy legacy. It may well be that the greatest impact of the Project only really becomes evident in the years to come.



BHNF has created a huge opportunity in terms of the good-will, skills and resources it has left. The greatest threat to this legacy is complacency. The risks faced by the Blackdown Hills natural heritage remain immense. The challenge now is to seize this opportunity, to build on the undoubted success of the Project and to achieve even greater heights.

"An outstanding project that will be sorely missed but, everyone connected can hold their heads high knowing what a wonderful impact and difference they have all made"

(The content of this report represents the author's interpretation of the data. This data is limited and not exhaustive. Although the author has made every effort to ensure that the information in this report was correct at the time of writing, the author does not assume and hereby disclaims any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause).

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Appendices

- I. Methodology**
- II. Trainee case study**
- III. Discovery day case study**
- IV. Events analysis**
- V. Education evaluation**
- VI. Education case study**
- VII. Arts evaluation**
- VIII. Survey data**

Appendix I.

Methodology

Over 30 interviews were carried between November 2015 and November 17 in a variety of formats, such as telephone or face to face. The interviewees were selected by the project evaluator David Rolls from the BHNF files. Interviewees were chosen to enable a cross section of perspectives. Interviewees included events participants, land owners, community nature project coordinators, trainers and trainees. All interviewees were emailed the questions in advance. Responses have been anonymised. The questions varied each year depending on the focus of the evaluation. Questions from the third year are given below as an example:

- 1) In your experience what differences, if any, has the project made to wildlife, individuals and the wider community.
- 2) What are the factors that have contributed most to bringing about any change? Could BHNF have been more effective? Achieved more? Done things differently?
- 3) Looking forward five years, do you think the effects of BHNF will still be evident. What will the legacy of BHNF be?
- 4) Can you think of three words to describe your experiences of being involved with the project?

The interviews were supplemented with attendance and analysis at eight events as well as attendance at Steering Group meetings.

Appendix II.

Traineeships Case Study: Tom

‘The BHNF Project offers traineeship to recent ecology graduates hoping to move into the conservation sector. These unpaid positions will be offered over the spring and summer months each year. Each trainee that completes the programme will receive work based training in identification of species and habitats, data management and GIS mapping training and use of digital recording equipment’. (BHNF Project plan extract)

Over the course of three years nine trainees were recruited, from 300 applicants. Nine (100%) went into employment or study within the conservation/environmental sector within a few months of completing their placements. Tom was one of the early recruits joining the traineeship in the first year of the Project. Tom grew up locally in Somerset and then achieved degree in Animal Biology and Conservation at Oxford Brookes University. *‘I knew I wanted to enter environmental consultancy but was very aware that I needed some practical experience in the field to make this happen. The BHNF traineeships was a perfect next step and allowed me to give something back to the local area’.*

Outcomes for heritage, people and communities

Ecological skills and learning

‘The ecology skills were extremely helpful. I gained identification skills, learnt about protected species and the management of sites. We recorded what felt like hundreds of species and relayed that information to the appropriate record offices’.

Through the efforts of Tom, the other trainees and the wider project thousands of species records have been captured significantly contributing to the understanding of the local habitat.

Professional skills

‘As useful as the ecological skills that I gained were the professional skills that I learnt. How to approach landowners and to convey information to them in a precise, clear and appropriate way. I also helped with BHNF public events. These were things that I hadn’t done before’.

Trainees accompanied the Project’s ecologist on site visits and wrote up site management plans. Through the project over 150 site visits and numerous management plans were completed. This work has been a catalyst for a number of other local landowner focused initiatives.

Licences and certification

‘The experience I gained with the Project has helped me to achieve a number of ecological licenses. Such as dormice, newts and bats’.

Employment

‘I got a job! I was equipped with the skills to get a fulltime permanent position straight away after university doing the job I wanted to do. And these days that is pretty rare’!

Networks

'I spent time with number of wildlife consultancy firms as well as partner organisations such as the Devon Biological Records Office which allowed me to get additional insight and skills.'

A career

'The traineeship gave me an invaluable foundation for my present position in a busy wildlife consultancy. I now work with a portfolio of clients from the initial phone call right through to the invoicing. I am progressing towards being an Associate in my company and through the various level of CIEEM (The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management). The traineeship gave me the skills and confidences to do that'.

Lessons learned

Tom's experience and those of the other eight traineeships highlighted a number of valuable lessons to the Project.

Twin objectives: The challenge of mentoring trainees and delivering a high number of professional site reports although achievable was very challenging doing the busy summer survey period. It was only really possible due to the high calibre, committed Project staff.

Three day a week model: This allowed trainees to have paid work, or indeed fulfil caring commitments. Some came straight out of university whilst others were looking for career changes later in life.

Getting the people mix right: In the first year of the project traineeship sessions were open volunteers to join, to 'pop in' on an ad hoc basis. This was ultimately found to be quite disruptive and not conducive for either party. After discussion, new separate bespoke sessions for volunteers were created.

Three is a crowd?: There was an annual intake of three trainees. The 3:1 trainee to staff ratio worked very well and allowed trainees to have an exceptionally high level of quality input whilst allowing staff to deliver the other aspects of the wider project.

Quality recruitment: A well designed and considered recruitment process led to a high calibre of staff and trainees. This was crucial to the success of the programme.

Review, review, review: The traineeship programme was regularly reviewed. This was assisted by an external evaluator. This enabled the programme to be honed and consistently improved.

Appendix III.

Wildlife Discovery Days

'A day of discovery, exploring the natural world! A host of local experts will be on hand to help you seek out and learn about animals and plants. Hunt for butterflies, mini-beasts and reptiles; take a closer look at moths; do a spot of bird watching and learn how to identify plants and wildflowers. You can even try your hand at river dipping to explore fascinating freshwater creatures. If you feel like getting creative there'll be plenty of nature-themed craft activities too' (extract from the 2017 programme)

Over the course of three years The Blackdown Hills Natural Futures (BHNF) organised 63 public events, talks and activities attracting over 3400 participants. The annual Wildlife Discovery day was the flagship event for this programme.

The days became hugely popular with the public, venues, volunteers and local wildlife groups, attracting many hundreds, massively exceeding the total 3 year target of 60 participants. It presented the project with organisational headaches and opportunities in equal measure.

The days were centred around the commonly used 'Bioblitz' concept (www.bnhc.org.uk). Wildlife experts and organisations provided activities to inspire attendees to identify as many wildlife species as possible in a given area and time. Different venues were used each year in order to move around the area and to cope with ever expanding numbers.

Year one: Otterhead Lake Nature Reserve: An idyllic rural site with a range of habitats providing a wonderful setting for a wide range of free activities, such as stream dipping, mammal trapping and bat walks, all based around a central barn hub. The event was run in partnership with a local conservation group, who lease part of this Forestry Commission site, ensuring ample volunteers to help staff the car parking, welcome area and in-house catering for the 100 plus attendees.

Year two: Tracey Estate Parkland and Gardens, Honiton. www.traceyestate.co.uk/. A well-known wedding venue with extensive grounds including species rich grasslands, streams, a river and woodland, provided for a modest venue hire fee. Superbly equipped with covered accessible facilities, on the doorstep of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty's (AONB) largest conurbation. The location attracted even greater numbers, 300 plus, who enjoyed an inspiring range of free wildlife activities provided by the third sector and public organisations. A renewed emphasis was put on outreach with targeted marketing of traditionally underrepresented groups, such as organising transport for community groups.

Year three: Forde Abbey and grounds, Chard. www.fordeabbey.co.uk/. The project paid for use of the gardens and facilities and a number of the activities (birds of prey, wildlife crafts and Forest Schools), so that the event was available for free to the public though the vast majority of activities were still provided at no expense. The facilities were exceptional in terms of catering, toilets and a level site providing access to a range of habitats and enabled the event to cope with even greater numbers, approximately 500 people, in the final year. The location, although just outside the AONB provided a 'stepping stone' site into the AONB for the residents of Chard, a town with areas of deprivation. Although still a free drop-in event, attendees

were encouraged to book online and over 650 bookings were recorded prior to the event.

'10/10. A free day out, somewhere I have never been. friendly faces, questions answered and coffee and cake. Couldn't be better. If this happens every year we will come!'

Outcomes for heritage, people and communities

Fun and enjoyment: Typical quotes included, *'The best day the family has had out for ages', 'brilliant', 'inspiring', 'Child friendly but also nerdy enough for adults'*. Participants were inspired to try follow on events, volunteering and more formal learning activities.

New knowledge and skills: The events were blessed with inspiring activity leaders providing innovative opportunities. 97% of attendees reported that their knowledge and understanding of the local wildlife had improved.

Species identification and recording: 100's of species were recorded and shared with County Wildlife Recording Offices embedding good practice and leaving a tangible legacy.

Inspired venues: Better knowledge of their sites equipped hosts to undertake conservation management with renewed vigour and see fresh opportunities for public engagement.

New and embedded alliances: The events were extremely well supported and brought together organisations from all sectors enabling cross fertilisation of ideas and new contacts to be made.

New confidences: Providers themselves developed new skills and confidences, particularly around accessible public engagement, interacting with new audiences.

Raised AONB profile: The event undoubtedly raised the profile of the AONB.

Lessoned learned

Diverse marketing and publicity: Using a blend of methods worked. These included, for example, social media, posters, village magazines, school leaflet drops.

Good site selection: Safe, well managed sites which are fit for purpose, whether in the third, public or commercial sector were key. 'Weather proofing' the event was essential.

Outreach works: Going the extra mile, often quite literally to community events, schools, voluntary and community groups meant the project reached new audiences both in terms of communities of place and of interest.

Innovative event locations: 'Taking' the event to be on the doorstep of different conurbations meant greater diversity and numbers at the event in years two and three.

Volunteer capacity: Enthusiastic, well briefed and equipped volunteers and community groups were essential. As is the capacity of project staff to manage and enable them.

Outcome focused: Concentrate on the quality of the engagement as opposed to quantity.

Feedback and reflection: The project team actively analysed the value of the event each year with an external evaluator. This laid good foundations for the latter years.

True cost of running the event: In the first year of the project the Wildlife Discovery Day was a relatively low-cost event to run attracting 120 people. As a first event of this type for the project, a significant amount of staff time was required to ensure the event was a success and safe but overall it was relatively low cost to run, costing around £1000 (excluding staff time and volunteer expenses)

In year 2 the costs approximately doubled and staff time increased as more people were expected to attend. A larger venue was required which had to be 'rented' for the day. The year 2 venue wasn't geared up to cater for larger numbers of members of the public so toilets had to be hired in and catering arranged to ensure people were well looked after and enjoyed themselves. More activities were needed to keep the event fresh and interesting which increased costs. 350 people attended in year 2.

In year 3 the costs more than doubled again. BHNF project staff we well experience at organising, promoting and running these events and so staff time planning the event was reduced. However, due to good publicity and word of mouth recommendations from previous years the event was predicted to attract more than previous years so a much larger venue was required with suitable infrastructure and facilities. Use of the venue required a larger rental fee but made running the event much easier to organise and run.

'We've had a brilliant day. My two girls loved the mammal walk and river dipping in particular. Really well organised and lots to do! Thank you'

Appendix IV.

Event analysis

An introduction to Birds of the Blackdown Hills

Sunday March 13th 2016, 10:30 - 15:30, (Smeatharpe Village Hall and Southey Moor)

'Join Somerset Ornithological Society and the Blackdown Hills Natural Futures project for a beginners guide to identifying a variety of bird life on the Blackdown Hills. Learn top tips on how to identify a range of birds by sight and sound and learn about some of the more unusual species inhabiting the hills. After lunch we will take a short walk to see what birds can be identified in the field. Materials and survey methodology provided by the British Trust for Ornithology. Free tea, coffee, soft drinks and biscuits provided. Bring a picnic lunch, sturdy boots and wet weather clothing'

What worked well	What worked less well	What could be done differently
Clarity of offer. Course content and level made clear in advertising.	Inside for the nicest part of the day	Weather proof programme – perhaps greater flexibility to get out in the sunshine
Visually attractive venue with lots of display materials out and	More could have been made of books and resources on display	A stronger link to specific survey training could have been made

opportunities for progression and next steps		
A healthy number of participants without being oversubscribed (23 participants)	Possibly a few birds too many covered for a basic course, for example nightingale, redstart?	Could a greater link be made to the value of sketching for bird ID. Would this broaden the audience?
Passionate speakers		
Good presentations with both audio and visual content		
A warm welcome with tea, coffee and a smile		
'Fresh' participants- lots of people new to 'birding'		
Good spread of ages		
Variety of habitats, pasture, arable, garden, farmyard, green lane, woodland, non-improved SSSI		
Birds focused upon appropriate for habitat, season and venue		
Practical advice given, for example regarding binoculars		
Dig deeper – <i>'I live a mile down the road but I didn't know this footpath existed at all. We will be coming back next week'</i>		

Dormouse Surveying

Thursday May 19th, 2016 Folly Farm, Riggles Farm

Monthly maintenance of dormouse boxes and surveying across four sites in the Blackdown Hills

What worked well	What worked less well	What could be done differently
Less physical outdoor conservation volunteering compared to other more strenuous practical opportunities	Some confusion over finding boxes	Could mapping and GPS make some of the boxes easier to find?
Mix of skills levels		Clear succession strategy required
Integration of trainees and volunteers		

Surveying conduit for learning about wider habitat		
Opportunities for week days and weekends		
Land owners actively engaged		
Healthy mix of professional and volunteers.		
Biological Records Offices actively involved.		

Blackdown Hills Wildlife Discovery Day,
Wednesday, June 1st 2016, 10:30 - 3:30pm
(Tracey Estate Parkland and Gardens, Awliscombe, Honiton)

‘Join the Blackdown Hills Natural Futures team and a host of local experts to search for and identify a wide range of wildlife. Search for birds and butterflies, learn to identify plants and wildflowers, see small mammals up close, search for mini-beasts and reptiles, identify moths caught in the moth traps, search the river for freshwater bugs (bring wellies!), meet wildlife up close, cakes and refreshments and much more. Fun for all the family - suitable for all ages. Children must be supervised. Drop in anytime during the day’

What worked well	What worked less well	What could be done differently
Diversity in terms of ethnicity, age and physical mobility of participants	Some found finding the location confusing	More corporate signage. Could the logo be on the event signage?
A good mix of providers (public agencies, commercial business, small and large third sector bodies)	Some providers felt their activities were inappropriate for the venue and surrounding habitat	Could a ‘opt in’ briefing session be held at the venue the week before for providers and key volunteers
An extensive range of engaging educational activities	Was enough made of the ‘next steps’ and other opportunities open to participants such as other events, volunteering and training >	Further build on links with community groups working with underrepresented groups
Accessible venue, e.g. hard floor in marquee for stalls. Microscopes allowed those with limited mobility to get up close to findings		Could more capacity building support be given to small community wildlife and conservation groups, e.g. help with display materials etc.
A friendly welcome by stewards with free, well managed and accessible car parking		Clearer signage of First Aid point, lost child point and the event team. Perhaps ID lanyards for the latter

Conservation groups signing up new members		Could more be done to encourage last minute participants in from Honiton on the day itself. E.g. face painting, balloons?
Bespoke pre-event outreach to underrepresented groups		Nice to see lambs in a pen. Can the farming theme be developed at future events?
Providers pleased 'a lot more people than I expected'. Host very happy with the event and raised profile		People counter at entrance to accurately capture attendee number?
Well equipped with appropriate catering		

Marsh fritillary butterfly survey workshop

**Thursday September 1st 2016, 10.30 – 3.30
(Smeatharpe Village Hall and Southey Moor)**

A free training day for any volunteers interested in helping to monitor populations of the marsh fritillary butterfly on the Blackdown Hills (In partnership with Butterfly Conservation)

What worked well	What worked less well	What could be done differently
Winning combination of specialists, landowners and volunteers.	Workshop was late in the season leaving little time for volunteers to implement their skills	Have the training workshop in the earliest possible window – March?
Good signposting to the event by other local organisations, for example 'I found out through the Neroche Volunteers'	Lateness of the workshop left little time for maps and permissions to be organised	Organise maps and permissions over the winter prior to workshop
'Collective thinking' regarding site management possible by having species experts, landowners and members of the local community on site	Ambiguity between Butterfly Conservation and Natural Futures team regarding who would be responsible for supporting volunteers in the future	Actively promote other surveying opportunities so although workshop was late in the season other opportunities to 'get involved' were promoted.
Good local produce and accessible community venue used		
Combination of indoor presentation and practical outdoor survey		

Accessible presentations for all levels – beginners and expert.		
Physical wellbeing ‘A healthy way to spend a day’		
Integrated technology, participants informally supported to use survey and recording ‘App’s’		
Volunteer travel costs actively offered (00.45ppm)		
Health and safety regarding surveying nicely reinforced		

‘I knew very little before I started. It has been a winning combination of informative workshops, Conrad (Project Officer) and apps. It has helped me have a far greater understanding of my local area’

Schools Evaluation



Blackdown Hills Natural Futures Environmental Education Programme 2017

Evaluation

Catherine Farnell

Contents

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Introduction

The Blackdown Hills Natural Futures (BHNF) primary schools environmental education programme was delivered between 2016 and 2017 and succeeded in working with a total of 12 different primary schools and over 1000 school children.

This document reports on the evaluation of the environmental education programme during its second year, 2017. The purpose of the evaluation was to measure the success of the project at delivering high quality education sessions, and to inform future education programmes due to be undertaken in the Blackdown Hills Area of



Outstanding Natural Beauty (BH AONB).

Building on the success of the BHNF environmental education programme in 2016, the programme in 2017 aspired to work with 10 primary schools and 300 pupils in the Blackdown Hills AONB with the aim of:

1. Engaging children with the distinctive wildlife of their local area so that they learn about wildlife, geology and different habitats.
2. Encouraging the children to attend other suitable BHNF events with their parents.
3. Raising awareness of the distinctive wildlife and countryside of the Blackdown Hills to teachers and to encourage them to use the natural environment around them as a teaching resource.
4. Giving teaching staff the skills, confidence and resources to continue to deliver similar environmental sessions or arrange outdoor wildlife activities once the project has ended.

After the success of the programme in 2016 in reaching over 600 children, the focus of the project in 2017 shifted from engaging large numbers of children to working with fewer children, allowing more time to be spent with each class and a greater focus on exploring the unique and special nature of the BH AONB.

The BHNF environment education in 2017 ran along side a BHNF schools art project which was delivered at the same time as the environmental education programme. The art project was run separately and is not evaluated in this document but is referred to as it impacted on the way in the environmental education programme was delivered.

Evaluation Methodology

The same methods were used to evaluate the project in both 2016 and 2017 to provide continuity across the programme. The feedback from teachers and pupils was collected through questionnaires, observations and informal conversations (see appendices 1 and 2 for teacher questionnaire example). Assessment of engaging Key Stage 1 (4 to 6 years old) children in

environmental education relied more heavily on observation and conversation, whilst children in Key Stage 2 (7 - 11 years old) were given more opportunity to provide written feedback through comments on post-it notes. Numbers of children and staff participating were recorded at each session (see appendix 3 for school visit details).



11 sessions were delivered in 10 primary schools across the Blackdown Hills AONB area.

Over 300 primary school children participated in wildlife education sessions about the Blackdown Hills AONB.

25 teachers, headteachers and teaching assistants were involved in the wildlife education sessions.

A summary of school visits and activities undertaken can be found in appendix 3

Summary of Outcomes

The impact of the BBNF Environmental Education Programme

The very positive feedback received through the evaluation process demonstrates that the BBNF environmental education programme has had an impact in the four key areas as set out in the aims of the project.

1. Engaging children with the distinctive wildlife of their local area so that they learn about wildlife, geology and different habitats.

The feedback from the children highlighted that they both enjoyed the sessions and learnt specific information about their local wildlife (see appendix 5 for pupils comments). Throughout the sessions the children were engaged in all the activities and the teachers noted how the hands on

I enjoyed doing the Bio Blitz, it was so fun and I loved the day. I hope you come next year and do the same.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 5 pupil

nature of the activities ensured that all learners could fully take part in all the sessions.

2. Encouraging the children to attend other suitable BHNF events with their parents.

I learnt there are 5 types of habitat in the Blackdown Hills and I enjoyed the bug hunt.

All Saints C of E Primary School, Year 5 pupil

I mostly enjoyed pond dipping. I think this was the best morning ever.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 4 pupil

To fulfil this aim, and engage the parents (who we did not have direct contact with at school), we provided each child with a 'grow your own mini meadow' kit to take home which included the BH AONB events programme. This was to encourage a discussion with parents about the environmental education session the children had taken part in at school and about attending other BHNF events. We have not been able to collect data to assess how successful this was at getting children and parents to attend BHNF events but children from the schools that we had visited did attend the BHNF celebration event at Forde Abbey. Also, all the teaching staff that we surveyed either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the following statement:

- I am likely to encourage the teachers and pupils to attend more Blackdown Hills Natural Futures events/ activities in the future.*

3. Raising awareness of the distinctive wildlife and countryside of the Blackdown Hills to teachers and to encourage them to use the natural environment around them as a teaching resource.



All the teaching staff that completed the question either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that:

- *The activities have improved my knowledge and understanding of the wildlife at our school and the Blackdown Hills.*
- *I am likely to use the natural environment as a teaching resource.*

The degree to which the schools already used their natural environment as a teaching resource varied significantly between the schools but all schools were keen for us to both extend their outdoor learning and share the resources that we had developed.

As a result of our visits, several schools have further developed their wildlife areas. For example, Hemyock primary school has applied for a grant to develop the decking around the school pond to make it safe and accessible for the children. Buckland St Mary school have taken part in a Community Nature Project to develop a nature garden and other schools such as Membury have reported smaller changes such as encouraging the children to take out bird spotting books at lunch and break times.



See



*Great games to start the session - gave me some great ideas too.
The children loved it - thank you very much.
I would highly recommend your team!*

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, Miss Goodson

appendices 4 and 5 for more comments from teachers and pupils

4. Giving teaching staff the skills, confidence and resources to continue to deliver similar environmental sessions or arrange outdoor wildlife activities once the project has ended.

In discussions with the teachers and from the questionnaire feedback it was evident that we had provided the teachers with ideas about how to further use the outdoor environment.

Brilliant afternoon - some great activities that we will use and adopt for forest school and our Dartmoor residential.

Stockland Primary School, Lucy Bartlett

All the teaching staff who were surveyed also 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement that:

- *After today's activities, I will continue to deliver similar environmental sessions or arrange outdoor wildlife activities.*

Beyond the original aims of the project, a significant impact of the programme has been to establish a very positive relationship between the schools and the BH AONB. This was most notable this year when contacting schools to arrange visits. The process was much quicker as the schools were familiar with the BH AONB and were keen for us to return and deliver environmental sessions. When we visited the schools, lots more of the children were now aware of what the BH AONB stood for.

Review of Outcomes

Achieving the aims of the project in 2017 was made significantly easier due to the positive relationships that had been established with the schools and the Blackdown Hills AONB during the previous year.

Having visited the schools previously we were aware of the variety in size of schools, from schools with a total of 22 pupils to schools with over 170 pupils and the differing nature of the school grounds, some having very limited grounds (Membury primary school) to others that have established nature and Forest school areas (Upottery Primary School). As a result, we were able to use this knowledge to devise activities that were very adaptable to the age and number of pupils and size and nature of the school grounds.



One of the issues that arose from the previous years project was amount of time it took to prepare the resources for each session. By streamlining the resources and designing activities which could be repeated in each school but were adaptable to size of the school meant each session was less time consuming to prepare for. (See appendix 3 for list of activities in schools)

Last years school programme highlighted how busy the summer school term is and it was necessary to make initial contact with the schools in the autumn term and confirm dates for our visit during the spring term to be able secure dates that were suitable for all the participants in the session and the DAISI artist (who was delivering their sessions immediately after the environmental education ones). There were still issues with a few dates where the schools had double booked so we had to remain flexible and adaptable to the schools requirements to ensure that we could deliver all the sessions in all the schools.

During the previous years programme it was thought that using volunteers would be beneficial to assist in the delivery of the sessions to increase the proportion of adults to children to allow more individual time for the children to engage in the activities. We trialed using a volunteer in several of the sessions. It was a success as this increased the adult to pupil ratio and resulted in a more beneficial experience for the children. The volunteer gained experience of working in schools and this has led them to consider a career in education.

Lessons Learnt

There could be greater involvement of volunteers in the schools environmental education sessions. We successfully trialed using a volunteer to assist in the delivery of some of the sessions. One of the teachers from Broadhembury School noted that it would be beneficial if the children had even more individual help identifying the different species. This could be most successfully achieved by increasing the adults to children ratio which could be done through the greater involvement of volunteers in future sessions.

There needs to be one key contact communicating with the schools. Both the environmental education programme and the art project run by DAISI were successfully delivered at the same time, however, there was occasionally some confusion from schools about the sessions as they were being contacted by two different organisations. For future collaborative projects, it would be ideal to have one key person contacting each school to streamline the organisation process and avoid repetition.


Successful engagement of the schools requires early contact with the schools to allow sessions to be planned into the curriculum and booked into the school diaries.

Future work should inform the schools about the large number of environmental education resources already available on-line. Teaching staff, including specialists in out-door education, were often unaware of the range of environmental education resources already available on-line and future work with schools, should try to educate and connect the teaching staff with these resources.


All the schools participated in a Bio Blitz activity which was a very successful way of engaging the children with wildlife that was in their immediate surroundings. This activity could be repeated at the schools but it would be worth investing in expert guides to be used by the adults, in particular an invertebrate guide, along with guides appropriate for primary school aged children.

There were regular requests from the schools for us to return next year. It would be beneficial to build in further schools education programmes in to future projects.


Example Teacher Questionnaire



**Blackdown Hills
Natural Futures**
Discover it - Share it - Do it



LOTTERY FUNDED



Blackdown Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Thank you for taking part in today's Blackdown Hills Natural Futures environmental education activities. Please help improve future school sessions by answering the statements below.

- The children were engaged in today's activities.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------
- The children learnt about the wildlife at their school and of the Blackdown Hills.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------
- The activities have improved my knowledge and understanding of the wildlife at our school and of the Blackdown Hills.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------
- I am likely to use the natural environment as a teaching resource.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------
- After today's activities, I will continue to deliver similar environmental sessions or arrange outdoor wildlife activities.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------
- I am likely to encourage the teachers and pupils to attend more Blackdown Hills natural Futures events/activities in the future.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------------------------	----------	-------------------
- Any other comments? Were any aspects of the session particularly successful? Could anything have been improved?**

Brilliant afternoon - some great activities that we will use and adapt for forest school and our Dartmoor residential trip.

School: <i>Stockland</i>	Name (optional): <i>Lucy Bartlett</i>	Date: <i>26.4.17</i>
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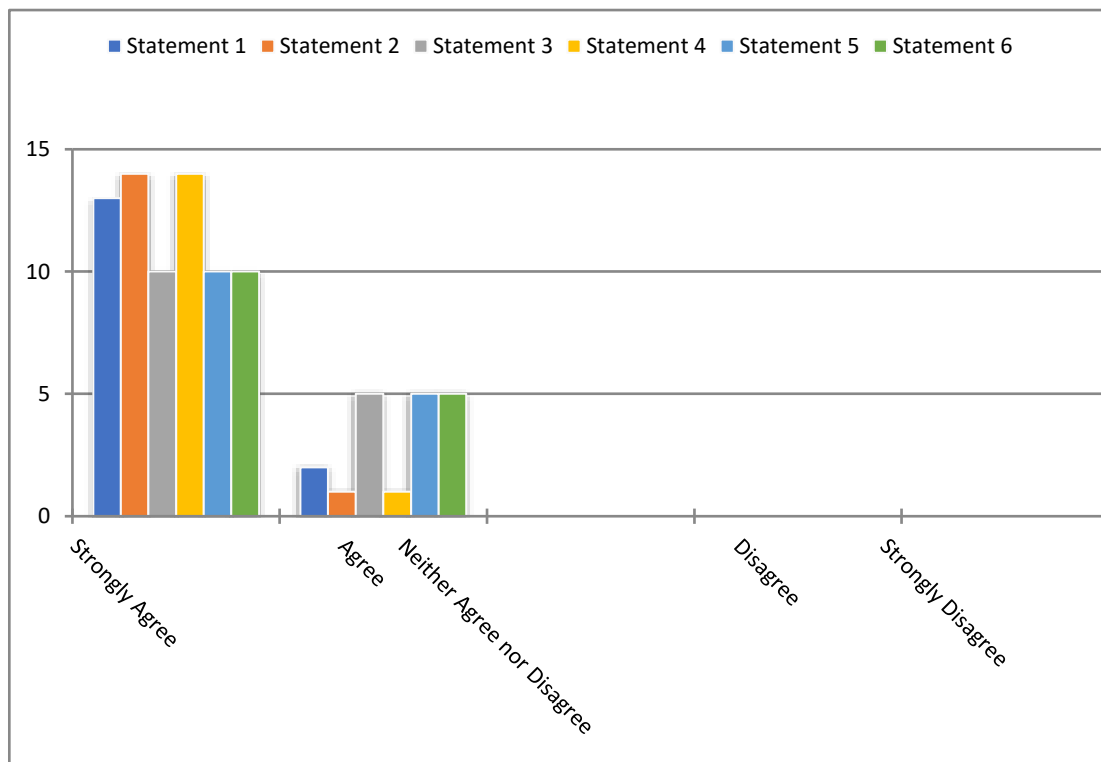
Summary of Questionnaire Data

The chart below shows the feedback we received from all the completed questionnaires was very positive and all the teachers and teaching assistant either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* with all the statements below.

1. The children were engaged in today's activities
2. The children learnt about the wildlife at their school and of the Blackdown Hills
3. The activities have improved knowledge and understanding of the wildlife at out school and the Blackdown Hills.
4. I am likely to use the natural environment as a teaching resource
5. After today's activities, I will continue to deliver similar environmental sessions or arrange outdoor wildlife activities.
6. I am likely to encourage the teacher and pupils to attend more Blackdown Hill natural Futures events/ activities in the future.

Summary of the responses to the Blackdown Hills Natural Futures environmental education program 2017

Number of questionnaires completed by teachers or teaching assistants: 15



Summary of Schools Visited and Activities Undertaken

Primary Schools	Date	Approx. no. of pupils	No. of school teaching staff	Brief summary of activities
Hemyock Primary School Hemyock Devon EX15 3RY 01823 680240	06/07/2017	32	3	The year 4 class participated in the activities. We discussed five key habitats found in the Blackdown Hills AONB and played a game to develop their understanding. We explored the school grounds with a colour and texture hunt followed by a BioBlitz. The session finished with a nature card collection activity which the teacher was going to use as inspiration for art work.
Awliscombe Primary School Honiton Devon EX14 3PJ 01404 42031	16/06/2017 30/06/2017	40	3	We visited the school twice and worked with all the key stage 2 children at the schools request. All the children looked at five key habitats found in the Blackdown Hills AONB and played a habitat game. The children explored wildlife and habitats found on their school grounds using a colour and texture hunt which was followed by a BioBlitz. This included looking at mini beats, plants, birds and stream dipping. The sessions finished with a nature collection activity which linked with the work they were doing with the DAISI artist in the afternoon.
Stockland C of E Academy, Stockland, Nr Honiton, Devon EX14 9EF 01404 881456	26/04/2017	32	2	The year 2 and 3 class participated in the activities which included an exploration of the different habitats found in the Blackdown Hills AONB, a colour and texture hunt, BioBlitz across the school grounds and pond dipping.
Culmstock Primary School Hunters Hill, Culmstock, Cullompton, Devon, EX15 3JP 01884 840598	18/05/2017	32	2	The year 5/6 class took part in the session. They looked at five different key habitats found in the Blackdown Hills AONB and played a habitat game. The children explored the wildlife found on their school grounds through a colour and texture hunt followed by BioBlitz and discussed the habitats found on their school grounds.
All Saints Primary School All Saints, Axminster, EX13 7LX 01297 32761	22/06/2017	33	3	We worked with the year 5/6 class. We introduced the class to the different key habitats found in the Blackdown Hills AONB through playing a game followed by a discussion about the different habitats present in the school grounds. Children explored the wildlife found on the school grounds through a colour and texture hunt followed by BioBlitz and nature collection activity.

Primary Schools	Date	Approx. no. of pupils	No. of school teaching staff	Brief summary of activities
Membury Community Primary School, Membury, Devon EX13 7AF 01404 881491	07/06/2017	22	3	The whole school participated in the activities. We discussed the five key habitats of the Blackdown Hills AONB and conducted a colour and texture hunt, BioBlitz and nature collection activity in the school grounds. The BioBlitz gave an opportunity for the children to revisit the wildlife habitats they created during the previous years visit.
Broadhembury Primary School, Broadhembury, Honiton, Devon, EX14 3NF 01404 841304	19/05/2017	20	2	The keystage 2 class (year 3,4,5,6 children) participated in the activities. We introduced the class to the different key habitats found in the Blackdown Hills AONB through playing a game followed by a discussion about the different habitats present in the school grounds. Children explored the wildlife and habitats found on their the school grounds through a colour and texture hunt followed by BioBlitz.
Upottery Primary School, Upottery, Honiton, Devon, EX14 9QT 01404 861292	24/05/2017	30	3	We worked with one class made up of reception and year 1 children. Through playing a game and discussion we explored 5 key habitats found in the Blackdown Hills AONB. We then explored the school grounds with a colour and texture hunt followed by BioBlitz. This allowed the children to revisit the habitats they made on our previous visit last year (bug hotel, bee homes etc). The session finished with a nature card collection activity which linked with the art work they would be doing in the afternoon with the DAISI artist.
Buckland St Mary C of E Primary School Chard, Somerset TA20 3SJ 01460 234251	05/07/2017	30	2	Both part of the year 2/3/4 class and the year 5/6 were involved in the session. The children discussed the different habitats they had visited in the Blackdown Hills AONB and played a habitat game. This was followed by a colour hunt and texture hunt of the school grounds, a BioBlitz and a discussion about the new habitats that could be created in the area that is being developed as part of the Natural Futures Community Nature Project.
Kentisbeare C of E Primary School Fore Street Kentisbeare Cullompton EX15 2AD 01884 266330	27/07/2017	30	2	This was the first time we visited Kentisbeare C of E primary school. We worked with the year 3 class and introduced the different key habitats found in the Blackdown Hills AONB by playing a habitat game. This was followed by exploring the wildlife and habitats on their school grounds through a colour and texture hunt, BioBlitz, pond dipping and nature collection activity.

Comments from Teaching Staff

Super activities - age appropriate, staff personable and knowledgeable. Appropriate variations in activities.

Hemyock Primary School, Mrs Gaskin

This was a very successful morning - the Reception/ Year 1 children were totally involved - excellent resources for lots of hands on work coupled with the attitude and enthusiasm of the Blackdown Team made for a productive and exciting morning. We do appreciate the understanding of your staff of the evolving nature of a school morning. Thank you all.



Upottery Primary School, Anne Hawkins

Great activities enjoyed by all - more please!

Upottery Primary School, teaching assistant

Great session, all the children enjoyed it (and so did !!)

Upottery Primary School, Melanie Prettejohn

All pupils were very engaged and were able to carry out activities independently. They took pride in their work and were excited to share what they found. Great resources available for the children to use and the activities encouraged lots of discussion.

Buckland St Mary C of E Primary School, Fiona Cridland

The session was fantastic and the children were fully engaged throughout. It was good to get them to appreciate the wildlife around them that they often take for granted.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, Claire Gunningham

Great games to start the session - gave me some great ideas too. The children loved it - thank you very much. I would highly recommend your team!

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, Miss Goodson

The children really enjoyed being outside and learning about the plants and wildlife that can be found at their own school. They had fun and learnt a lot. Thank you.

All Saints Primary School, teacher

[Were any aspects of the session particularly successful?] The way the children were encouraged to look at their environment in detail. Look at colours that surround them (more than just green).

All Saints Primary School, Callum Mitchell

Made the children look around and explore their surroundings.

All Saints Primary School, Callum Mitchell

Great idea about the habitat games - will steal the idea for Forest school and residential trip on Dartmoor.

Stockland Primary School, Angela Whitten

Brilliant afternoon - some great activities that we will use and adopt for forest school and our Dartmoor residential.

Stockland Primary School, Lucy Bartlett

The children loved finding mini-beasts and identifying them. Even our more reluctant learners were really engaged.

Broadhembury C of E Primary School, Charlotte Peddry

The BioBlitz was great. As one child said, we couldn't believe there are so many different species on the field that we had no idea were there.

Culmstock Primary School, Rebecca Giffard

Comments from Pupils

I enjoyed doing the Bio Blitz, it was so fun and I loved the day. I hope you come next year and do the same. I hope you enjoyed the day with us and thank you for coming.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 5 pupil

I enjoyed the river dipping and the mini-beast hunting. I found a cased caddis. I also enjoyed making a bee home.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 5 pupil

I have learnt some new habitats and I enjoyed doing pond dipping.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 5 pupil

I mostly enjoyed pond dipping. I think this was the best morning ever.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 4 pupil

I enjoyed searching for different mini-beasts. I love different ones like slugs.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 3 pupil

I have learnt that there are more different types of trees than I know.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 3 pupil

I enjoyed the river and I am really happy that I caught a fresh water shrimp and I have seen it before.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 4 pupil

I learnt that there were lots of amazing wildlife in school and favourite find was the pill woodlouse.

Buckland St Mary C of E Primary School, Year 5 pupil

I enjoyed looking at nature properly. I found out that there are lots of types of snails.

Buckland St Mary C of E Primary School, Year 5 pupil

I enjoyed looking for mini-beasts. I learnt that there is a lot more to nature than it seems.

Buckland St Mary C of E Primary School, Year 5 pupil

I learnt what AONB meant and I have learnt that mini-beasts can be found anywhere.

Buckland St Mary C of E Primary School, Year 5 pupil



I really enjoyed the habitat game and looking at all the wildlife.

Membury Primary School, Key Stage 2 pupil

I'd never heard of the Blackdown Hills before and I really liked learning about it.

Membury Primary School, Key Stage 2 pupil

The best bit was we saw a NEWT!!!

Upottery Primary School, Year 2 pupil

I like finding out about lichen.

Upottery Primary School, Year 2 pupil

I learned to recognise species.

Upottery Primary School, Year 2 pupil

I learnt there are 5 types of habitat in the Blackdown Hills and I enjoyed the bug hunt.

All Saints C of E Primary School, Year 5 pupil

I learnt how to identify habitats and I will enjoy it even more next year!

All Saints C of E Primary School, Year 5 pupil

It was so much fun to find all the bugs and name them. You can't do anything better. It was brilliant.

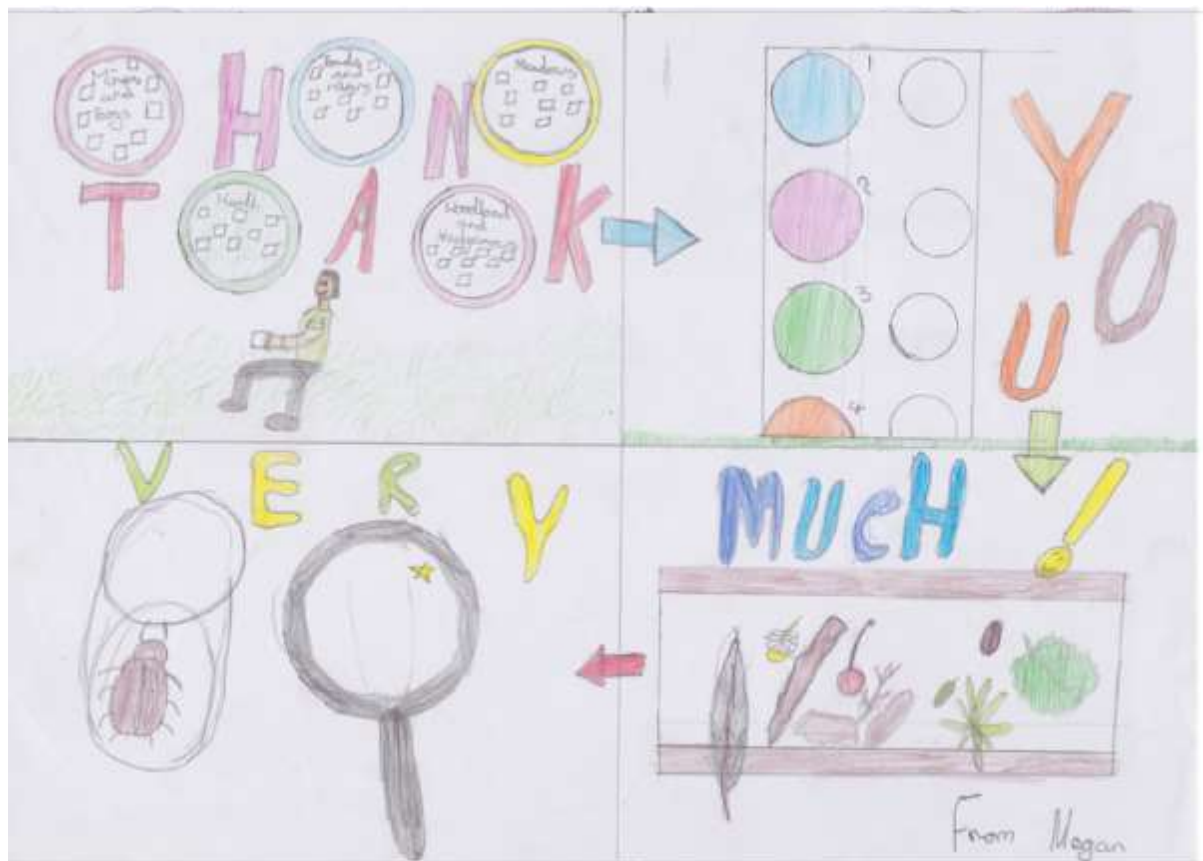
All Saints C of E Primary School, Year 5 pupil

I loved seeing what all the different bugs were and moths, especially the large yellow underwing.

All Saints C of E Primary School, Year 6 pupil

Example Thank You Cards from Year 4 Pupils at Hemyock Primary School







Appendix VI.

School case study

The Blackdown Hills Natural Futures (BHNF) Education Programme worked with primary schools across the Blackdown Hills AONB between 2016 and 2017. The main aim of the the programme was to engage children with the distinctive wildlife and countryside of the Blackdown Hills whilst also encouraging teachers to use the local natural environment as a teaching resource and give them skills to continue to deliver similar environmental sessions.

To achieve these aims, a working relationship was established with 12 primary schools across the Blackdown Hills; this had not been achieved previously by the AONB. The 12 primary schools varied significantly in both number of pupils and size of school grounds. Consequently, to meet the needs of all the schools, sessions were planned which would engage and enthuse the pupils and teachers but were also adaptable to suit the size and facilities of the schools.

The programme was very successful and over the two years, 24 sessions were delivered in 12 different schools to over 1000 school pupils. This exceeded the target of working with 10 schools and 600 pupils. The very positive feedback from both the teachers and pupils demonstrated that the programme succeeded in its aims of engaging both children and their teachers in the wildlife of the Blackdown Hills.

Great games to start the session - gave me some great ideas too. The children loved it - thank you very much. I would highly recommend your team!

The following two case studies give a further insight in to the activities that were undertaken at the schools. The first case study at Hemyock Primary School highlights the successes of the project whilst the second case study, Broadhembury Primary School, demonstrates some of the challenges of working with schools.

Hemyock Primary School

Hemyock Primary School was actively involved with the project. It was identified that there was a pond on the school grounds which was rarely accessible to pupils as it was not used by the teachers. As a result, the first session run at the school focused on the pond. Across the day, five classes took part in pond dipping and developing the wildlife area around the pond. A hibernaculum, bug hotel, and bee homes were created and wildflower seeds sown. The day was very successful and engaged and enthused both pupils and teachers about the potential of using the pond area more regularly .

During the second year, the focus changed from reaching as many children as possible to concentrating on one class and giving them a more in depth experience. The activities centred around a BioBlitz of the school, letting the pupils explore and identify as many species as possible.

Having worked with the school over the two years, the school have fully embraced developing the pond and wildlife area of the school grounds. To ensure children can regularly take part in pond dipping, the school have applied for a..... grant to replace the decking area around the pond.

Broadhembury Primary School

Broadhembury Primary School is one of the smaller schools on the Blackdown Hills AONB with a total of 31 pupils. The Environmental Education Programme did successfully work with the school across 2016 and 2017 but there were challenges due to regular changes in the teaching staff.

The school were keen to be involved in the project, but the initial liaising with the school was complicated due to a change in teaching staff after the first term. The project did, however, deliver a very well received session in 2016. Rob Grimmond (from Somerset Ornithological Society) gave a presentation about birds in the Blackdown Hills and bird boxes, pine cone bird feeders and a bug hotel were made by the children.

In 2017, the teaching staff changed again and when we contacted the new teachers they were unaware of the Natural Futures Environmental Education programme. After extra work with the school, we did succeed in continuing with the project at the school and delivered a session which looked at the different key habitats found on the Blackdown Hills AONB and explored the wildlife and habitats found on their school grounds through a BioBlitz.

The regular change of staff meant that it was more difficult to develop the project with the school over the two years and more time was required to engage with the new teachers.

Outcomes for heritage, people and communities

Inspired schools: working with the teacher to show them the potential of their school grounds for environmental education resulted in renewed interest to develop their school grounds to make them more wildlife friendly.

Engaged and enthused children: Typical quotes included, *'I loved it', 'Best morning ever' and 'Please come back next year'.*

Shared knowledge and skills: Teaching staff involved in the project reported that they had learnt more about the wildlife of the Blackdown Hills and were likely to use our ideas to deliver similar sessions.

Raised AONB profile: By educating the schools about the uniqueness of the Blackdown Hills AONB it has raised the profile of the AONB.

Lessons learned

Working in collaboration with the school: Successful engagement of the schools requires early contact with the schools to allow sessions to be planned into the curriculum and booked into the school diaries.

Use of volunteers: Experienced volunteers assisting in the delivery of the sessions increases the proportion of adults to children to allow more individual time for the children to engage in the activities.

Extending the reach of the schools programme: Production of publicity material and information that the children can take home after a school session to share with their parents and extend the reach of the BBNF project.

Evaluation, feedback and reflection: Regular evaluation and reflection on feedback from the pupils and teachers ensured the education programme meets both the aims of the projects and the needs of the school.

I enjoyed doing the Bio Blitz, it was so fun and I loved the day. I hope you come next year and do the same.

Awliscombe C of E Primary School, year 5 pupil

Appendix VII:

School Art workshops and Exhibition – final report

Project overview

Daisi was commissioned to deliver the 'Arts Engagement and Natural Discovery Exhibition' element of the 3 year Natural Futures project. To develop, manage and run a series of art workshops across 9 of the primary schools in the Blackdown Hills area and to arrange for a public exhibition of the final artwork. This would incorporate a series of half day printing workshops in all 9 schools and 5 additional whole day workshops in 5 of the schools.

Daisi's registered artist, Monica-Shanta Brown, was contracted for the project. With her experience in schools and her attention to detail and planning, as well as her passion for the natural environment, she was the best and most suitable artist for this project.

Monica, worked closely with the educational consultant Catherine Farnell and the Natural Futures Project Manager James Mayben, who were able to share all the specific information and detail related to the Blackdown Hills and the identified habitats. This provided Monica with a wealth of information, allowing her to plan and prepare thoroughly all the necessary materials and resources for each workshop.

All the school had previously been involved in environmental activity days in 2016. This gave a good foundation for the children to develop their knowledge and understanding further through the engagement in the creative workshops. Each school focused on one of the 5 identified habitats and gave scope for a much more in depth exploration of the animals and species associated with it.

The 5 habitats:

- Mires & bogs
- Woodland and hedgerows
- Rivers and ponds
- Meadows
- Heath land

5 large panels were then produced in the one day workshops, with each panel representing one of the habitats. These panels were created, using layers of different painting and printing techniques. The final compositions that incorporated some of the prints created in the half day workshops (over 1000 individual prints were created in total), were designed through thoughtful and considered discussion by the children, with help from Monica.

Each school was also asked for ideas on how to best use and display the remaining prints as part of the exhibition; this allowed the children a personal ownership over the final interactive element of the exhibition, with requests for mobiles, fishing rods and flower pots to be created.

Project Objectives

- 1. To engage children with the distinctive wildlife of their local area and to learn a bit about key species.**

Key achievements

- 9 primary schools in the Blackdown Hills AONB engaged in this project.
- 270 children took part.
- 5 specific areas of this AONB were focused on.
- Over 40 species of flora, fauna and wildlife were explored and learnt about.

'I liked working with Monica because I learned lots of things about nature. I enjoyed making all the prints and learned lots of different art techniques. When I saw the panel at the end it felt like I was actually there.' Rosie (Yr3)

'Yes the children were really engaged with the pre-events about the different habitats that can be found in the Blackdown Hills and also when they were involved in the actual art project.' Teacher

'The children definitely engaged in the specific species found in their immediate environment. The opportunity to explore the species from a 1st hand experience and then deepen this through observation during the creative workshops really inspired them.' Monica Shanta Brown, Artist

2. To interpret and encourage children's creative response to nature and their locality through a variety of media/art forms

Key Achievements

- Children were able to explore new art forms and techniques i.e. printing and painting with real leaves, grasses, flowers etc.
- The children were taught how to really look at the natural colours and consider how to create the wide variety of shades and tones.
- Collaborative work was developed and group discussions and debate took place around composition and overall aesthetics.
- The use of high quality reference materials allowed the children to really see the detail, the colour, the textures and the patterns of all the relevant species.
- The children learnt about the process, the logistics and the time scale of large scale collaborative work.

'The children had the opportunity to use a variety of different media – printing, collage etc and for some of them it was their first experience at printing using rollers' Teacher.

'To work with Monica was like having a one day holiday of art. I enjoyed sticking down all the prints of the creatures and I learnt that art isn't about just getting it done. When I saw the panel at the end I felt like I had just beaten Usain Bolt!' Grace (Yr 4)

'The children were able to use a variety of techniques and processes, including, painting, print making, coloured print work and embellishment. They had to consider composition on a large scale, work in a truly collaborative manner and see the final piece as a whole and not focus on their individual element. The children really wanted to convey the true qualities of the specific habitat.' Monica Shanta Brown, Artist

3. To raise awareness of the distinctive wildlife and countryside of the Blackdown Hills to event attendees, through enjoyable activities and attractive displays

Key Achievements

- The children were asked what could be done with all the other art work that was not included on the final panels. They considered how this could be used in more interactive ways.
- Information boards were created by the artist, to highlight and explain what all the different species were on each panel.
- A separate activity panel was created in the exhibition space, to allow visitors to 'have a go' and add to an ongoing 'live' panel.
- 5 large panels created and displayed in a public space. The display being accessible for over 3 months and is accessible to the public and centre users.
- Through partnership and collaboration children were able to learn about this AONB through multiple and diverse methods.
- The children were able to contribute to art work inspired by their own environment, through a series of school events.
- The children produced work that would go on public display.

'Some of the children after taking part in the art day then came into school with various different collages that they had made at home using some of the techniques that they had learnt'. Teacher

'The people I met at the exhibition event were very impressed with the outcomes. There was such a positive reaction to seeing such high quality work created by the young people and it was lovely to hear that the exhibition had inspired the centre's visitors and users to create their own panel.' Monica Shanta Brown, Artist

'Verbal comments to me have expressed amazement at the professionalism of the work... disbelief that children put them together.' Hemyock Healthy Living Centre manager

'The children through events such as this and the forest school sessions that they take part in every Wednesday experience first-hand how fortunate they are to live in go to school in an AONB.' Teacher

'The attendance at the workshops really deepened the children's appreciation of living in this AONB and even though the attendance of the exhibition was not as high as we had hoped, those that did attend were really proud of their work and impressed at the quality of the art.' Monica Shanta Brown, Artist.

4. To celebrate the work of the community nature project where applicable and inspire other communities to enhance their local wildlife.

Key Achievements

- The exhibition inspired the Cameo group, the centre's regular elderly users, to create their own panel.
- The local Hemyock, art group who are focusing on an art project looking at the crayfish, have taken ideas seen at the exhibition to use in their own work.

'The elderly visitors to the centre who belong to the Cameo group, were so inspired by the children's artwork, they asked if they could create their own panel.' Healthy Living Centre Manager

Project delivery

Between 3rd May and 18th July, Monica ran 9 half day printing workshops and 5 whole day workshops. The half day workshops supported and complimented the half day environmental workshops that Catherine Farnell delivered and allowed the children to deepen their learning of a specific element of their focus habitat through the use of artistic and creative practice.

270 children engaged in the workshops and were able to contribute to the creation of the final artwork.

The schools involved were:

Whole and half day

- Stockland C of E Primary
- Buckland St Mary C of E Primary
- Awliscombe Primary
- Culmstock Primary
- All Saints C of E Primary

Half day

- Upottery Primary
- Broadhembury Primary
- Membury Community Primary
- Kentisbeare C of E Primary



'As a Primary School and Forest School teacher I believe it is really important for the children to connect with their environment. We need to make sure that the children do not become complacent or forget how lucky they are to live in such an amazing part of the country and that they take pride in this fact and get involved in keeping it for future generations. The work they did with Monica was very motivating for them and the buzz in the classroom was contagious, they have thoroughly enjoyed every phase of the project. The final product was absolutely amazing and I am so proud of what the children have accomplished, I can't wait to see all the panels together.' Angela Whitten, Teacher

Comments from the Exhibition visitors book

Stunning artwork – well done to all the schools involved and the artist. Good luck with the rest of the exhibition.

I really enjoyed seeing these, so colourful and interesting for my grandchildren

Very clever children, fantastic display, well done one and all

In detail, it is fascinating; in its totality it is lovely

*Lovely and colourful – Reminds us of all the wonderful nature we have on our doorstep.
Well done aren't we lucky!*

I am really proud that it turned out fine. I didn't know if they would but, I really enjoyed making them and they look fabulous

Fantastic, so great to see our panel up on the wall and how it relates to all the others. Great work – thanks to all of you for giving us the opportunity to take part in such a great project.

Fantastic exhibition and great to see so many schools involved

I really enjoyed doing the printing and these look amazing

Loved the prints and the tying together into the big panels - great colours and amazing effort from such a variety of ages.

Both classes enjoyed these sessions so much and gained so many valuable skills in both the art and the nature sessions. I love the final piece and would love to be involved again if you do something similar in the future.

Fabulous exhibition! The school children have produced some fantastic work which really captures the beauty of the Blackdown Hills.

A lovely exhibition – we will be back.

Recommendations

Overall the creative and artistic outcomes for this element of the project were very successful, with engagement levels high, participation strong and the final outcomes exceeding many expectations. With projects that involve a public exhibition, it is always difficult to know how many people will attend and what the impact to the wider community will be. It is therefore recommended that for future projects, that careful consideration needs to be given to the benefits of public exhibitions and the location or venue that they are held in. With so many participants being involved and the geographical area being so large and diverse, there may have been other options available that would have allowed more people to have viewed and interacted with the work.

It has also raised the question of how schools and communities view the concept of an exhibition and whether the value gained from seeing work in a public space is fully appreciated. This is something that could be really explored in more depth and introduced at a much earlier stage of a project.

The engagement and motivation that the exhibition raised with the local Cameo group, who attend the Healthy Living Centre, was inspiring and also raises the question of how one can engage these small specialist groups from an early stage. Their ideas and input added a different level of involvement and has shown how children's art work can inform and inspire a different generation to reflect and consider their local environment as well.

