

Toolkit:

How to run wildlife activities at public events

Description

Wildlife activities are a great way to emphasise the wildlife in parks, to involve young people and adults and to educate people about the environment so they appreciate and respect it. The site may have a habitat, a species or even several of both that can be promoted to the public, or perhaps it is issues such as climate change that affect the biodiversity of parks that need to be highlighted. In each case wildlife activities may be the way to do so.

There are some activities such as minibeast hunts and nature walks that are quite popular and are widely used in nature reserves, school outings and of course park events. These are easy to run and lots of information is available out there to help you. This toolkit aims to point you in the right direction as well as inspiring you to be creative and invent your own activities.

Here we hope to point you in the right direction. Of course you can always be creative and invent your own activities so we hope this toolkit will also inspire you.

Organisation

Once it is known what activities are going to happen at the event and what they involve it is important to fill out a risk assessment (please find below). Before doing this you need to choose what parts of the site you are going to use and assess its suitability. Consider what age groups will be involved in the activity when filling in the risk assessment.

It is also important to consider the participants age when designing the activity, the approach may vary with different age groups. Be flexible and prepared to adjust the level of the activity to the ability of the group. Also be prepared to include adults in the activities.

Consider what issues and points you would like to get across in the activity, ask questions to find out what the group already know and then consider how to develop their knowledge.

When deciding on group size, consider the age range of the participants and how many people are available to lead the activity. It may also depend on the ability of the leader. It is recommended to have a leader: participant ratio of 1:6, especially when working with children if their parents or guardians are not present.

If the activity leader is the only adult running the activity in the absence of a parent/guardian then they need to be CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checked. For safety when advertising the activity it is advised to state that children can only take part if their parent/guardian is present; in this case there is no need for a CRB check on the activity leader but you may consider having one anyway. See the GreenSpace toolkit, 'How to involve young people in parks and green space community groups' for more information on legalities of working with young people.

Prepare all the equipment a few weeks prior to the event. If preparing for activities such as a minibeast hunt or pond dipping the local authority may be able to provide some equipment and even expertise on the area. It may be worth investing in some equipment if planning to make it a regular event. The following websites provide this type of equipment:

<http://www.alanaecology.com/index.html>

<http://www.uksafari.com/shop/index.htm>

Here are a couple of websites that sell identification charts and guides:

<http://www.field-studies-council.org/>

http://www.wildforms.co.uk/html/field_guides.html.

If involved in the activity but unfamiliar in identifying species, it is advisable to do a trial of wildlife activity first and try to identify the species using identification guides. Perhaps contact a local expert or knowledgeable amateur to assist in developing these skills (they may even be willing to help out on the day). There are also courses that may interest you if you find you have a passion for this, the following websites sometimes advertise such courses:

<http://www.riverflies.org/index/courses>,

<http://www.field-studies-council.org/>.

Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know what something is during the activity, assist the participants in identifying it from the guide. If you still can't identify it, encourage the participant to investigate further when they get home on the internet. Try and take a photo of the species.

Here are some useful websites to identify plants and invertebrates;

<http://www.botanicalkeys.co.uk/flora/>

<http://www.projects.ex.ac.uk/bugclub/bugid.html>

<http://www.kendall-bioresearch.co.uk/key1.htm>

www.nwt.org.uk/files/uploaded/download.php?filename=Minibeasts.pdf

Most of these online keys are quite basic; if you want to identify the species to a species level it is best to use a book such as the Collins guides.

Health and safety

Once it is known what activities are going to happen at the event and what they involve it is important to fill out a risk assessment (please find below). Before doing this you need to choose what parts of the site you are going to use and assess its suitability. Consider what age groups will be involved in the activity when filling in the risk assessment.

Be aware of any allergies or medical issues in the group. As the activity will most likely be a case of participants turning up on the day rather than signing up before hand, ask the group and their guardians if there are any medical issues or allergies that the activity leaders should be made aware of. Consider if the activity may adversely affect them and take any safety precautions to avoid conditions that may affect them.

If working in freshwater, advise anyone with open cuts or sores not to go in the water. This is a safety precaution against contacting Weil's disease, a bacterial infection carried by rats. When working in long grass or shrubs advise participant to wear long sleeve tops and trousers tucked into their socks or boots if possible, to avoid cuts and scrapes but also to avoid ticks attaching to the skin which can in some cases cause Lyme's disease, another bacterial infection.

Provide hand washing facilities for after the participants have been handling animals and plants and exploring different habitats. Also advise participants to be careful when handling animals and plants, bring their attention to any biting, stinging or thorny plants or animals. Don't kill any animals on purpose and don't pick any rare or uncommon plants.

How to run a minibeast hunt

Description

This activity involves searching for invertebrates such as spiders, beetle, millipedes, snails and identifying them.

Equipment

White trays, pooters, magnijars, identification charts, pitfall traps, trowel

Preparation

Choose an area of the site that has plenty of vegetation such as a meadow, a coppice, a thick hedgerow etc. Once the location of the activity is decided, it is a good idea to create a log pile if possible. This can be done a few weeks before the activity to encourage invertebrates to the area and even sometimes amphibians such as newts. To make a log pile, gather logs, branches and twigs; pile them on top of each other and scatter leaves and soil on top and then wait and see who makes it their home.

On the morning of the event a couple of hours before the activity begins, lay pitfall traps. Pitfall traps are simple and easy to make and almost guaranteed to catch some kind of invertebrate. Dig a hole with the trowel in the ground to fit a used yogurt pot or plastic cup, make sure the top of the cup is level with the soil surface and fill in any gaps around the edge with soil. Place a piece of apple or other food in the cup to attract the invertebrates. Lay several of these pitfall traps in different vegetation around the area of the site. It is a good idea to mark on a map of the site the position of each pitfall trap.

To see a diagram of a pitfall trap visit:

www.chatburnwildlife.org.uk/resources/pdf/teachersguidetosorting.pdf

Demonstrate the equipment

- White trays- for examining invertebrates once caught.
- Pooters – a device to suck up small invertebrates into a jar. Take care to make sure the animal you are sucking up is no bigger than the opening of the tube. Do not use this device on worms, slugs or snails. To find out more about pooter go to <http://www.show.me.uk/site/make/NaturalWorld/ACT59.html>.
- Magnijar - a container that has a magnified lid to allow a closer view of the specimen
- Identification charts – a step by step guide to assist in the identification of invertebrates.

Method

Once a group has assembled for the minibeast hunt, run through the health and safety detailed above in the organisation section of the document. If necessary divide the group and assign an activity leader to each group.

Firstly find the pitfall traps that were laid previously; give the young people hints on where they are and see if they can find them. Empty the invertebrates into a white tray and help the participants to identify them. This will give them an idea of what they will be looking for.

Once the equipment has been demonstrated divide the equipment between pairs of participants and describe their geographical boundaries. Then start hunting; look in the log pile by carefully picking up the logs and looking under the bark. Look between the grass and other vegetation, on tree trunks, in leaf litter and on walls. Advise the participants not to kill anything they find.

To make it more fun and challenging devise a points system; designate the rarer species with higher points and whoever gets the most points wins.

Help the participants to release all the species that have been caught and advise them to wash their hands. Do a question and answer session afterwards and see how many species they can remember.

Other activity examples

Making log piles

As described above in the preparation for a minibeast hunt, making log piles can also be an activity in itself, which the community can become involved in on the day. In a few weeks or months they can check to see what is living in them. The log pile will become an ongoing place of interest in the park.

Making bird boxes and insect boxes

Wildlife and conservation organisation are often keen to come to events and run this task with the public. Obviously this task needs tools and wood which these organisation may have easy access to and also supervision and demonstrations. Contact the local branch of the BTCV and the RSPB and see if they would be interested in running this activity.

Guided nature walk

Please see the GreenSpace toolkit on Guided Tours to find out how to organise one. To successfully run a wildlife guided tour, good in-depth local and natural history knowledge is required.

Safari

A wildlife safari in a UK park is quite like a guided nature tour but you can incorporate several small activities into it. If the safari is themed on one particular aspect of the nature on the site, this can allow more depth on a subject and development of interesting activities. For instance theming the activity around trees, this can incorporate:

- Taking bark rubbings from different trees
- Identifying different leaves and buds
- Looking at trees in different life stages
- The management of trees
- Making arts and crafts from trees

Bird watching

The diversity of birds in a park may depend on the time of year. A local keen bird watcher may be quite willing to be involved in pointing out different species to the public. The RSPB or the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) may also like to be involved and run an activity to help promote their organisation. This activity can be done by setting up in a good viewing point for birds, such as by a lake or a thick hedgerow.

Pond dipping

This activity is quite similar to the minibeast hunt described previously. To find out more about pond dipping and how to run this as an activity go to:

<http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/attachment/fc800b746ce299bfba94ac9f47e97b28/62a05811ca786ccba66b824111cdc75b/Pond+dipping+for+beginners.pdf>.

<http://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/articles/education/resources/teg/1996/ponds/>

Fossil hunt

Some sites may allow for this activity depending on their geology and management. The following website gives details on the safety code to follow when collecting fossils:

http://www.ukfossils.co.uk/national_collecting_code.htm

This website gives more safety tips

<http://www.discoveringfossils.co.uk/fossiltrips.htm>

Microscope

This activity requires some expensive equipment and expertise but with a little research, individuals or an organisation may offer to run such an activity. This would perhaps follow a minibeast hunt or a pond dipping session, allowing people to look at the invertebrates and plants they may have found under a microscope. Aquatic invertebrate are easier to view under a microscope in a little water as they are less likely to crawl away. On the other hand the activity organiser could bring along invertebrates and plant material they have already collected. This activity can take place even if it rains as it needs to have suitable cover such as a marquee or gazebo to protect the equipment.

Petting farm

There are several companies that run petting farms that are often interested in attending park events. This is a nice way for people, to get up close with animals. There is however a general cost involved and a need to supply hand wash/wipes.

Bulb Planting

Depending on the time of year, bulb planting in the park is a great way for the local community to get involved in practical work in their park. The local park ranger and gardeners could be involved in leading this activity and may appreciate the community giving them a hand with their tasks in the park!

Games

Squirrel hide and seek

(taken from Woodlands(2004), produced by Wildlife Watch and written by Jane De'ath and Anne Heaton)

Squirrels are probably one of the best known woodland mammals and their daring can amaze children! Squirrels spend most of the winter asleep, waking only to search out food they have buried the autumn before. Scientists are split as to whether the food they find is in a specific place they remembered burying it, or whether they are just lucky in their foraging. Either way squirrels are very good seed dispersers as they never collect up all the seed they bury.

Equipment

You will need enough acorns/conkers/hazelnuts for each member of your group to have three nuts in total.

Method

Give out the nuts. Allow 30 seconds for them to hide each of their nuts in a different place. Continue with different activities. At the end of your session allow 30/60 seconds for the children to find their hidden nuts. Timing is important. Some children will only find one or two nuts, some may even acquire someone else's nuts! Explain how squirrels aid seed dispersal by forgetting where they hid their nuts, and point out that it is often a trade-off between being able to find their nuts and hiding them well enough so other animals don't find them.

Scavenger hunt

(taken from Woodlands(2004), produced by Wildlife Watch and written by Jane De'ath and Anne Heaton)

Equipment

You will need a list of scavenger items and a small bag or box for each child/group.

Method

This is particularly good during autumn or winter when there are lots of treasures to find on the ground. Give each child/group a bag or box and the scavenger hunt list. Set the geographical boundaries they can cover and the time they have to find the items. See how many of the items they can find on their list. Scavenger ideas might be:

- Something shiny
- A chewed leaf
- A seed with wings
- Something rough
- A nibbled nut
- A symmetrical leaf
- A feather
- A man-made object
- A long leaf
- Something prickly
- A smile

Who am I?

(taken from Freshwater(2004), produced by Wildlife Watch and written by Jane De'ath and Anne Heaton)

Equipment

You will need pens or pencils, card, sellotape

Method

After the children have been pond-dipping or on a minibeast hunt ask each child to choose an animal. They can pick birds, insects, fish, mammals, arachnids and amphibians etc. Ask each child to draw their animal on a piece of card. Underneath the picture they need to put all or some of the following information: the animal's name: where it is found; whether it is soft or hard-bodied; how it moves; how many legs it has; its size; how it breathes; how it feeds.

Once they have finished , mix up the cards and tape one to each child's back. In pairs, the children take turns to question each other to try to discover what they are. Only 'yes' and 'no' answers are allowed. Questions such as: Do I live underwater? Do I have six legs? Do I have a bony skeleton? Have I got feathers?

Eventually the children will guess their own identity. Once all the children all of them have discovered their identities , if the group is large enough you can help them sort themselves into herbivores and carnivores. Get the children to build up food web, linking them together with wool. Ask the children what will happen if an animal near the bottom of the food chain disappears or absorbs some poison. Get them to trace the effects through all the links. They should see that the whole web would ultimately be affected.

What to do if it rains

Depending on how well prepared the participants are for the minibeast activity and their willingness to do the activity in the rain, you may be able to continue with the activity but be aware of the participants getting too cold or wet. In the case that the participants will not go out in the rain and are sheltering in a marquee, the activity leader could find some invertebrates and bring them back to the group to try and identify them.

Most of the other activities will be able to continue as long as all the participants are dressed in appropriate clothing. However if it is continuous rain it may not be so enjoyable; therefore this is a judgement call based on the weather forecast and the enthusiasm of the group. The Who Am I? game can be played indoors and is a way to occupy children while the rain eases off.

Useful websites

To find some notes on classification and ideas for games, visit:
www.chatburnwildlife.org.uk/resources/pdf/teachersguidetosorting.pdf

For help when organising a minibeast hunt and other activities involving minibeasts, visit:
www.nwt.org.uk/files/uploaded/download.php?filename=Minibeasts.pdf

To find out how to become a Wildlife Watch leader and the benefits and information you will receive, visit:
<http://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/>

Other organisations to work with

British Trust of Conservation Volunteers (BTCV)

Tel: 01302 388 883
Website: www2.btcv.org.uk/display/home

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)

Tel: 01842 750050
Website: www.bto.org

Buglife

Tel: 01733 201 210
Website: www.buglife.org.uk

Butterfly Conservation

Tel: 01929 400209
Website: www.butterfly-conservation.org

Field Studies Council

Tel: 0845 3454071
Website: www.field-studies-council.org

Forestry Commission

Tel: 0845 3673787
Website: www.forestry.gov.uk

Froglife

Tel: 01733 558960
Website: www.froglife.org

Natural England

Tel: 0114 241 8920
Website: www.naturalengland.org.uk

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Tel: 01767 693 690
Website: www.rspb.org.uk

The Environment Agency

Tel: 08708 506 506
Website: www.environment-agency.gov.uk

The Mammal Society

Tel: 02380 237874
Website: www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal

The Woodland Trust

Website: www.woodland-trust.org.uk

Wildlife Trust

Tel: 01636 677711
Website: www.wildlifetrusts.org

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Risk Assessment Template

Area/ Location:

Task requiring assessment:

Person at risk (Under 18's require special consideration):

Slips/Trips	Fire	Machinery	Work at Height	Ejection of materials
Pressure Systems	Electricity	Vehicles	Noise	Lone Working
Temperature extremes	Hazardous Substances – Make specific COSHH Assessment		Manual Handling Operations – Make Specific Manual Handling Assessment	

Hazards Identified	Hazard Severity (H)					Likelihood of Exposure (L)					Risk Rating (H) x (L)
	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	
c)	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	
b)	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	
c)	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	
d)	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	
e)	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	
f)	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	
g)	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1	

H Factors: 5 = serious/death; 3 = moderate injury; 1 = minor/negligible

L Factors: 5 = definitely likely; 3 = likely; 1 = highly unlikely

Where any risk rating (H) x (L) is 8 or greater, control measures are required

Existing Control Measures in Place

a)
b)
c)
d)
e)
f)
g)

Additional Control Measures Necessary to Reduce the Risk to Lowest Acceptable Level

a)
b)
c)
d)
e)
f)
g)

Person responsible for maintaining and ensuring the introduction of existing/additional control measures

a)
b)
c)
d)
e)
f)
g)

Emergency Procedures for serious and imminent danger, e.g. fire, first aid, bomb threat

i)
ii)

Other Comments and observation

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Assessor

Date

Review date (no more than 3 years)

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Assessment must be reviews if circumstances change or there is reason to believe that this assessment is not valid.