CONNECTING SCHOOLS TO NATURE IN NORTH-EAST ENGLAND

2021/2023
About the Project

The British Ecological Society (BES), in partnership with MammalWeb Ltd. and SMASH-UK, is delivering a schools outreach project in the North-East of England, running until March 2023.

We are working with over 40 primary schools in the region, as well as providing training to 50 aspiring environmental educators in the process.

The project is delivering the green transformations of school grounds through wildlife-friendly activities such as the creation of wildflower areas and hedgehog-highways to installing bird-feeding stations, nest-boxes and insect hotels. This is being achieved through a combination of teacher training events, pupil workshops, and wider input from BES staff. By encouraging the green transformation of school grounds, we hope the project will open up the wellbeing benefits of nature to those currently least able to access them.

Project timeline and format

Each module is made up of a series of teacher training events, pupil workshops, and wider project events, split into three modules. These are delivered by BES Staff and our dedicated group of volunteer Environmental Educators.

The project has successfully delivered two modules on Mammals and Invertebrates. Our third and final module will focus on local bird life and is running from September – December 2022. We will be recruiting a small number of additional schools to join us for this last module of the project.
For Teachers – why should I get involved?

Project Benefits

On successful application to the project, each school* will receive:

- More than **£1000 worth of equipment and materials** e.g. camera traps, bird-feeding stations, litter pickers
- Three **classroom workshops** delivered throughout the year by BES staff and volunteers
- One teacher per school will take part in the full **teacher training program** with access to free teacher training workshops, one-to-one support from ecologists and informal opportunities for professional development
- Access to **tailor-made learning materials and resources**, including lesson plans, with links to the National Curriculum to support wider teaching
- **Access to an online digital hub** to take part in national **citizen science projects**, log your progress, and connect with other participating schools

*Please note that these benefits relate to schools who joined during the project launch back in 2021. Schools who join later or for a limited period of time may receive benefits that are proportional to the length of time they are enrolled.

The BES Encounters hub
Commitment

Schools can expect to receive regular communications throughout the project and be supported by BES staff and our project volunteers. Whilst we ask that one teacher acts as the lead contact for these communications, we very much encourage a whole-school approach to the project and are happy to provide support for this.

We do not wish, nor anticipate, this project to be a large extra workload for teachers, but rather a way of supporting schools to develop their grounds and current teaching on nature-related topics in order to achieve long-term benefits. We would however like teachers to commit to attending a minimum of four short teacher training workshops (in-person, virtually, or catch-up sessions to suit your schedule), and to maintain contact with BES staff and volunteers throughout the project.

For schools joining later on in the project, BES staff will provide direction on how best to catch-up with project activities so far but encourage the lead teacher to contact the team with any outstanding questions.

Schools Selection Process

The BES is specifically looking to receive applications from schools who stand to gain the most benefit from the project (i.e. those who currently have the least access or connection to nature and outreach opportunities or are traditionally under-represented in STEM careers). We welcome applications from any school in the North-East region of England.

Health and Safety

The BES is committed to following the latest COVID guidance and we will keep in regular contact with selected schools to ensure that teachers are happy with arrangements. The project will consist of a mix of both in-person and online events but in the event of increased COVID restrictions, the BES will switch to online formats as appropriate. The BES will also ensure that any in-person events will have appropriate First Aid assurance.

All activities will also be accompanied by full risk assessments that will be circulated along with our relevant Safeguarding and Code of Conduct policies prior to events. All relevant participants and (e.g. staff, environmental educators) will need to agree to these before attending any project events.
For Ecologists and Environmental Educators
– why should I get involved?

Our team of volunteer Environmental Educators are central to the project, helping design educational content, as well as communicate the wonders of science and nature through our pupil workshops. These roles will offer a fantastic chance to engage first-hand with schools outreach and science communication work.

Benefits

Whether you’re an ecology-obsessed undergraduate, outreach-keen PhD or postdoc, hobby natural historian, retiree, or environmental practitioner with an interest in education – we want to hear from you!

Upon joining the project, the BES will provide all the necessary training as well as a variety of other benefits and opportunities, including:

Training

- Personal and group training on topics including...
  - Science communication & outreach
  - Developing & delivering your own workshops
  - Practical conservation & using ecological survey equipment
  - Project & event management
- Plus access to an exclusive bank of wider digital training resources on science communication and public engagement

Careers advice and skills

- Personalised careers advice on CVs, interviews, and grant-writing
- Verification of your effort and time that can contribute to your professional development portfolio e.g. ...
  - CPD for professionals or towards graduate/PhD portfolios e.g. Researchfish
  - Logged hours for wider volunteering schemes e.g. STEM Learning or university schemes
  - Logged classroom time for aspiring teachers
- Networking opportunities to connect with local schools, teachers, and BES staff
- A written letter of recommendation and/or LinkedIn testimonial

Wider BES opportunities & events

- Option to enrol in free 12 month BES membership for first-time student members
- The scope and responsibility to design, develop and deliver memorable and inspiring activities for pupils
- Access to wider BES and project opportunities. Previous volunteers have published articles and even exhibited at public events – what might you get up to?
Registering your interest

Sound of interest? Full details of the role and personal requirements will be made available when recruitment announcements go live. Please keep an eye out on our website or twitter for updates.

Working with children

For safeguarding reasons, we require all volunteers to undergo an enhanced DBS check. The cost of submitting the DBS application will be covered by the BES.

Expenses

Any expenses incurred during the project will be reimbursed as soon as possible. We ask that volunteers keep all receipts for any travel and/or subsistence and submit the appropriate BES volunteer claims forms so that these can processed as efficiently as possible.

Your information

As part of the recruitment process and for the smooth-running of the project, we will collect relevant personal information from teachers, pupils, parents, volunteers, an other participants where appropriate. You can find the BES privacy policy here and our project-specific policy here for more details on how and why we are collecting data.

Two of our wonderful project volunteers exhibiting at STEMFest NetZero as part of the project
About the Outreach Project Team

The British Ecological Society (BES) is the largest scientific society for ecologists in Europe, with an international membership of over 6000 people. We support the ecology community at all stages of their careers through our journals, meetings, grants, and education and policy work. Founded in 1913, we were the first ecology society to be established anywhere in the world and we have been the champion for ecology ever since.

The BES has dedicated teams that work on careers, education, and public outreach. These teams help share ecological research with diverse audiences through a variety of events designed to increase the public’s understanding of what ecology is and why it should matter to them.

Sammy Mason, Project Officer

Sammy is our Project Officer – she loves all things related to schools outreach and public engagement with science. Her PhD at Durham University specialises in monitoring mammals through ‘citizen science’, and assessing how pupils can help local wildlife and improve their personal connection to nature. Sammy has built a number of partnerships with many schools and teachers in the North-East, with extensive experience delivering primary school workshops. sammy@britishecologicalsociety.org

Alexa Roditi, Outreach Project Assistant

Alexa is responsible for organising the logistics and communications sides of the project. She has experience in outreach and science communication, having supported the development and delivery of both in-person and online initiatives on STEM-related topics such as climate science and conservation. Please do reach out to Alexa should you have any questions or wish to chat about the project in more detail. alexa@britishecologicalsociety.org