

# BRILLIANT BIRDING IN THE NORTH EAST

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Blackbirds, blue tits, and black-headed gulls – these are all birds that you may see in your everyday life but not take much notice of.

However, pupils in the North East are connecting with their local feathered friends with the help of teachers and environmental educators who are getting them outside and transforming their schools into green spaces. Welcome to Module 3 of the BES Connecting Schools to Nature Project!

## A NEW GENERATION OF BIRD WATCHERS

Since the launch of the project in January 2022, we've engaged with over 10,000 students through a combination of our in-person workshops and online activities that have focused on mammals, invertebrates, and birds as well as the green transformations of their schools. The most recent phase of this project has focused on familiarising students with the range of bird species that inhabit their local communities. Pupils have been spending time outside, strengthening their connection with nature, and learning about local bird species. To make their playground a bird watcher's paradise, we supplied each school with a bird house and bird feeding station. Pupils were equipped with binoculars and FSC ID Guides and were assisted by our team of fantastic project volunteers. Pupils were encouraged to report their findings to bird citizen science projects such as the RSPB Big Schools Bird Watch.

**THE RESOURCES AND ONLINE PLATFORM HAS BEEN MY FAVOURITE PART. THE CHILDREN HAVE LOVED USING IT AND OFTEN ASK WHEN THEY CAN GO ON DURING THEIR FREE TIME.**

Victoria Mills, Laurel Avenue

The pupils were able to continue their engagement with birds and other wildlife when inside the classroom or at home using our online 'Encounters' platform. It hosts a range of quizzes and activities that can be completed to achieve a series of badges for the individual, and the

whole school. The Encounters platform aims to keep students actively engaged in nature-based learning in order to encourage a long-term connection and participation in nature.

## GOING GREEN

As well as getting to know their local bird populations, pupils have also been encouraged to think about how they can transform their school into a more wildlife-friendly environment. Throughout the project pupils and teachers were encouraged to design their ideal 'green school'. During this phase of the project, each participating school was provided with up to £400 for their own green transformation equipment. Schools have made lots of great changes to their grounds using this money, including making mini ponds, wormeries and bug hotels. Implementing these resources into school grounds will help schools continue with their commitments to connecting pupils to nature; bringing benefits to pupils and wildlife for years to come.

**WE HAVE SPENT MUCH MORE TIME IN THE WILDLIFE GARDEN, WHICH WAS HARDLY USED BEFORE AND WE HAVE A VISION FOR IT, ONE WHICH WE HAVE STARTED WORKING ON.**

Stephanie Wilkinson, Wolsingham Primary

## NEXT STEPS

As the period of in-school workshops comes to an end, the focus turns to our Encounters platform and wider legacy materials. Our aim is to further develop the platform to become a standalone resource that can be rolled out more widely, equipping teachers with everything they need to continue their nature connection journeys. We'll also be improving and disseminating all the resources made throughout the project, including lesson plans, activity ideas, and 'how to' guides for green transformations. \*

## CONNECTING SCHOOLS TO NATURE IN NORTH EAST ENGLAND PROJECT

Working with partners MammalWeb Ltd and SMASH-UK, we will improve school children's connection with nature, deliver green transformations to schools in disadvantaged areas, and help create the 'Environmental Educators of tomorrow' through the training and codesign of the project with teachers and ecologist volunteers. The project runs until March 2023.

This project is funded by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies. It is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency.

If you would like to take part or support the project in any way, please get in touch with [outreach@britishecologicalsociety.org](mailto:outreach@britishecologicalsociety.org)

