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09/12/2013

Survey Report

The Forest Academy

A Healthy Biodiversity

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Species and Habitats (see website) are in **bold** print and suggested nest boxes/feeding stations to be placed in the school grounds are in **red** print.

Zoe Day, Toni Lockwood, Jayne Robinson and Rachael Brooks all attended our Volunteers Training Day and so it would be advantageous for the school, if possible, to involve them when I visit school on the 7th January and with long term follow up work with children.

Dear Shelley, Steve and all concerned with Biodiversity at The Forest Academy,

Thank you for showing us around your extensive and exciting grounds. No wonder that it is called the 'Forest' academy with three large **woodland** areas, a large, **wild flower/grassland** and a boundary that abounds with deciduous trees and shrubs. In terms of wildlife development possibilities it is nothing short of stunning. Four persons (3 Teaching Assistants and a Teacher) attended our Volunteers Training Day and so our future involvement is very likely to be followed up for the benefit of children.

The Thornton Road Site.

A House Sparrow colony nest box could be placed on the North/East side of the school building. These, previously common birds are now red listed by RSPB and are in need of protection. The **Hedgerow** next to and including the Kendray Resource Centre is an excellent wild area with Beech, Field Maple, Horse Chestnut, Hornbeam, Bramble, Russian Vine, Laurel, Elderberry, Honeysuckle, Dogwood, Flowering Current, Blackthorn, Pyrocantha. **4 Tree Sparrow** and **1 Hedgehog** box could be placed here. The entire school fence line needs to have intermittent spaces dug underneath it for **Hedgehog** access. **Hedgehog** numbers have plummeted from 30 million to 1 million in the last 50 years and the school could be involved with a local community campaign to help them.

The Cyprus Road Site.

The large tree (Acer-possible Field Maple) on the path outside the Outdoor Learning Centre could accommodate **4 Bat** boxes. Pallets outside the Centre are ear-marked for the building of an insect 'hotel'. We would recommend that two 'hotels' were built so that one could rest while the other was studied. **Invertebrates** are the bed-rock of a healthy biodiversity and the school grounds are a haven for them. The bramble/ivy/elderberry scrub to the East of the Outdoor Learning Centre is an ideal feeding area and place for nesting birds such as Wren and Blackbird. **A bird feeding station** could be placed next to the woodland and children could observe from the classroom area.

The wild, extensive **grassland** area is a haven for **invertebrates** and small mammals. Pathways could be mown through it to provide children with study opportunities. **6 Bee** boxes could be placed here. One part of this **grassland** could be dug and the top soil removed so that **wild meadow plants** can be sown. The small amounts of Ragwort in this area may need to be removed as it is poisonous to grazing animals and possibly to human beings although this is not well recorded and is only a precaution.

The Silver Birch **Woodland**.

3/4 large Ash trees at the back of the **woodland** have seeded and now Silver Birch Trees are interspersed with Ash saplings. **6 Bat** boxes could be placed on the large Ash Trees and **8 Tree Sparrow** nest boxes could be placed on the Silver Birch trees. Pathways into this **woodland** would allow children access for study as long as the main area is left to remain 'wild'. If **English Bluebells** are not already present then some bulbs could be introduced taking care that the invasive Spanish Bluebell is not present. Wood anemones could also be planted. An assessment of **Woodland Flowers** present could be made in the Spring and Summer. **1 Hedgehog** box could be placed in this wood.

The South Eastern Boundary is another wild life friendly Hedgerow of scrub (eg Wild Rose and Gelder Rose) and small deciduous trees. There is a Fox track running parallel to the whole length of this boundary and the use of a wildlife camera would provide much interest. **4 Bee** boxes could be placed in this area.

The Hazel **Woodland**.

This is a relatively large area of previously coppiced Hazel with a few Hawthorn and Alder trees. The Hazel nuts are being eaten by the delightful Woodmouse. The careful use of a small mammal trap would be of interest to children.

The Foundation Year **Woodland**.

This is the third large area of mixed deciduous **woodland** which has Field Maple, Silver Birch and Alder among other trees. There are also **Bluebells** in this area. We need to ensure that they are **English Bluebells** and not the invasive Spanish variety. A Spring and Summer analysis of **woodland** plants would be useful so that we know what could be added. **4 Tree Sparrow** nest boxes and **1 Hedgehog** box could be placed in this area. We could investigate the possibility of having a **wireless camera** in one of the bird boxes. Two insect hotels could be created by children in this wood. A rectangular piece of wood left lying on the ground provided a good place for garden snails to winter. Further places for snails and slugs could be created in order to help the endangered **Song Thrush**.

The Car park and Entrance Area is bordered by an ivy based, young woodland 'hedgerow' with Rowan trees. Ivy is an excellent plant for **invertebrates** and Rowans provide an excellent food source for Winter Thrushes.

Regarding the edges of the school field consideration could be given to the new grass cutting regimes being adopted by Barnsley Council (contact Trevor Mayne, Biodiversity Officer at TrevorMayne@barnsley.gov.uk). These will help wildlife without interfering with play areas.

We would provide all new nest boxes free of charge, present them at a whole school assembly, help with their installation, set up a mapping and recording system and follow up with nest box cleaning and recording nest box contents in the Autumn. All activities will involve children and the school community. Please share this report with appropriate staff, governors and children and let us know whether you wish us to proceed.

Maintaining a healthy biodiversity is probably the most important challenge human beings will need to face in the future.

We look forward to seeing you on January 7th.

Kind regards,

Colin Graham.

Project Leader

Biodiversity in Schools