

BIODIVERSITY

Communications Toolkit

The Woodland Trust – Nature Detectives

Lead and partner organisations

- The Woodland Trust

Aims and objectives

- To encourage children to get to grips with their local environment
- To provide a bank of teaching resources and support for teachers

Target audience

- Schools and youth groups
- Families

Background

The Woodland Trust Nature Detectives website was set up two years ago and has gone from strength to strength.

Originally set up for schools and youth groups – it now boasts 21,000 user accounts – over half of which are families.

The ethos of the project is to encourage children to get outside and get to grips with what's going on in their local environment.

Funding for the project has been provided from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Summary of activity

The website was originally designed for schools and youth groups, but despite the direct marketing of the site to homes being very small scale, over half of the 21,000 user accounts are family accounts.

The site has had three quarters of a million hits since it started and in March 2007 was voted 'Junior website of the month'.

Aside from the puzzles and craft activities available on the site, it allows the user to create and develop their own private nature diary online, download colourful posters, stickers and seasonal charts to help identify birds, plants and trees and print a log book to take to the woods.

Part of the site is season specific and there is a good range of materials developed by teachers for teachers to fit in with outdoor education and the curriculum.

Staff do stress however that they prefer not to "teach teachers how and what to teach", but that they are in the business of providing a bank of resources from which teachers can pick and mix – according to their subject and interest.

The activities on the site not only educate and increase awareness of the environment, but also allow the seasonal information which children have recorded to be incorporated into the overall data collated as part of the Natures Calendar programme.

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Outcomes

Unfortunately, funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund has come to an end, but the Woodland Trust has decided to continue to support the resource using its own funds.

This means that Nature Detectives can no longer support regular free handouts to registered users. This resulted in an outcry from schools in particular, who did not want to see the resource and the valuable materials provided run dry.

However, a new Nature Detectives Club was launched in May 2007. Membership of the club costs £12 and will enable members to continue to receive seasonal information packs, together with a new poster that can be populated with 52 'challenge' stickers sent via weekly e-mails.

Each e-mail will even be timed to arrive when children get home from school on a Friday afternoon!

For further information

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