



Devon
Wildlife Trust

Wildlife Champions

**Celebrating ten
years of nature
based learning
in Devon**



Wilder learning

Rewilding education through natural literacy; making nature based learning accessible to all and developing our conservation leaders of the future.

At Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT), we believe that nature is for everyone and that everyone can play a role in nature's recovery. But access to nature is not equal and we recognised, over a decade ago, that many children and young people grow up without any experience of the natural world or understanding of how important nature is to our health, our happiness and to all our futures.



“The wildlife in the world is dwindling, no one else is going to save it. We have to give children the skills, we've got to give them the belief that they can do it, we've got to give them the passion to know that they can do it, because this is our future.”

Miss Scott, teacher, Willowbrook Primary School, Exeter

This need to help all young people benefit from nature connection and become our wildlife champions of the future was not supported by school curriculums or through teacher training. So, we started working with schools on the Wildlife Champions initiative, which aimed to put nature at the heart of the learning experience; to build or rebuild meaningful connections with 'wild' spaces for students and teachers alike; and to inspire a love for nature and the subsequent desire to take action for it.

A decade later and our Wildlife Champions are thriving. Over the last ten years, 104 schools and 25,000 young people have been reached by the project with, on average, 30 schools involved annually and over 400 Wildlife and Marine Champions developed each year. And there is growing evidence that nature based learning helps children feel better, learn better and care more. As we face today's ecological and climate crisis, reaching young people and helping them to know that they can make a difference is more important than ever.



“If we don't look after the wildlife like we are now, it's going to affect our living too!”

Megan, Year 5 student

We're on a mission to rewild education; to make learning in, with and about nature accessible to all and to develop a new generation of conservation leaders.



What is 'natural literacy'?

"Learning with, in, through and about nature (nature based learning), promotes 'natural literacy' – the idea that we can learn to 'read' the world around us and know our place within it as well as take responsibility for 'writing' a positive future for wildlife and people."

Paul Martin, DWT Education Lead

How does it work?

Schools establish a 'council for wildlife' created from class representatives, who are voted for by their peers.



The champions are invited to attend an annual conference, where they meet other champions, learn from experts, and take practical action for wildlife. Young champions are encouraged to take what they learn and make a tangible difference for wildlife in their school or local community.



Over the course of a year, the champions are encouraged to choose a project to work on with the support of enthusiastic teachers and the DWT education team, and to share and celebrate achievements at the end of the year.



"What started as a small partnership has really grown. We've shaped our curriculum around Devon Wildlife Trust's expertise, and I have noticed a huge change in children's attitudes, behaviour, learning and sheer enjoyment of coming to school."

Mrs Mackay, headteacher, Stoke Hill Infants and Nursery School

The Wildlife Champions year

- September** Students in schools are identified as wildlife representatives and a Wildlife Champions team is formed.
- October** Wildlife Champions conference takes place. A mix of learning and practical activities designed to inspire the champions to take action for wildlife in their school or community.
- October to December** DWT education team meet students to plan a project for the rest of the year.
- January to March** Wildlife Champions work on their projects and invite DWT staff in for a support session.
- April to July** Students complete projects and record outcomes, using DWT staff to support. Successes are shared and celebrated.

Ten years of Wildlife Champions



Our Wildlife Champions work has been supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery, the National Marine Aquarium, South West Water, The Darlington Charitable Trust and South Devon Nature Trust.

Transforming grounds/embedding learning: Willowbrook Primary School



One of the schools that joined the Wildlife Champions after the initial year was Willowbrook School. To begin with, the initiative linked into their eco-friendly work of composting, recycling and energy saving, but wildlife rapidly became of interest to students and staff. Blessed with an abundance of grounds, when the project began, an orchard had been planted, but much of the rest of the space was underused and lacking the variety of habitats for learning and wildlife.

Early projects saw the children adding bug hotels as well as planting hedges and flowers. However, a vision for more was being formed.

Wildlife Champions were tasked with making the school grounds more accessible for learning and, at the same time, started planning to have a pond installed. Whilst school leadership secured funding, the Champions built a



forest school area, including making pallet seating and a fire pit. With determination and teamwork, the school added the pond, an outdoor classroom, a polytunnel and the forest school area over the next few years. At the



same time, children were being allowed to explore and learn about the new spaces to make the most of the opportunities that were being created.

Through staff training and co-delivery of curriculum, what started with the Champions developing grounds has turned into a widely used space for regular curriculum learning, wildlife habitats and wellbeing.



Learning goes outside: Alphington Primary School



Following the success of developing a programme with Willowbrook and with ongoing funding for this work secured from the players of People's Postcode Lottery, in 2019, a presentation to a group proved to be the trigger for a new project with staff at Alphington school. Led by Headteacher Sharon Tarr with outdoor and forest school lead Kat Williams, we embarked on an ambitious project to take learning outside.

Starting with a staff training session after school, work in the school has evolved to include regular curriculum sessions to link learning outcomes in the classroom with activities outside. Delivering sessions together in the grounds allows staff to build knowledge and confidence in outdoor learning and there has been a marked increase in the use of the spaces across the school as a result.

"I could never have come up with a scheme like that, the children have gained masses from the sessions, and it has slotted in so well with our themes for this term."

Miss Oakley, Year 1 teacher, Alphington Primary School



Sessions have also been delivered alongside staff with the aim of utilising time in nature as a positive tool for students personal, social, and educational wellbeing. Initially targeting specific students, the aim is to increase connection with nature across the school to the benefit of all.

"It has been such a positive experience for the staff and children connecting them with the natural world. It has been fantastic to see everyone become so invested in our grounds, supporting with both learning and wellbeing."

Miss Williams, Outdoor learning lead, Alphington Primary School

There are now designs on how the grounds will be shaped to support learning across the community and it has been exciting to see the innovative ways in which it has already been used, including a starlit adventure for foundation children. There is so much more to come!

Marine Champions

In 2013, DWT launched a Marine Wildlife Champions project from Wembury Marine Centre in partnership with National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth. The aim was for students to learn more about the wildlife living in the seas around them and to take action to protect it from further harm. The project has been a delight to our Marine Officer, Coral, as she has taken students and teachers on a journey of discovery and exploration into a mysterious and amazing world on their doorstep, inspiring them to love and care for all marine life.



“They’ve found out loads about the marine environment and how the problem of plastic pollution really affects the wildlife there and as the project’s grown and grown the children have come up with lots of ideas for things they want to carry on with.”

Key Stage 2 teacher

In the ensuing years, and with additional financial support from sponsors such as South West Water, the Champions have enjoyed beach conferences where they experienced the rocky shore life first-hand and met experts from the National Marine Aquarium, Marine Biological Association, National Trust, and Shark Trust. Together, scientists and children shared their ideas for protecting the oceans, before the latter took back plans to their school communities.

64 groups have participated so far and some of the projects have been very memorable! From convincing a school tuck shop to ditch plastic bags for paper ones to campaigns to change what goes down the toilet, we have been amazed by the creativity and passion from the children who have taken the lead on making a difference for marine wildlife.



“It’s not planet Earth, it’s basically planet Ocean, and if we don’t keep it running then the world won’t be as beautiful as it is now.”

Year 6 student



South Devon Nature Champions

Following the ongoing success of the Wildlife Champions in Exeter and the Marine Champions at Wembury, DWT has begun to expand the work into other areas of the county. In 2018, with support of the South Devon Nature Trust, the South Devon Wildlife Champions project was launched with schools in the South Hams and Torbay. The project partnered with the Field Studies Council at Slapton who hosted our first conference at the Start Bay Centre for 100 students.



Unique to this project is the incorporation of technology into nature based learning. Students are developing trails and content around their school site which can be used to reveal hidden nature through smart phones or tablets. At the same time, they are introducing users to why wildlife is important and actions they can take to help - digital champions! We are excited to see where this will take us next.



Students focused on learning about wildlife they could take action for locally, from hedgehogs and birds on the school grounds, to managing plastic pollution in their local community. After three years, the project has developed into a programme to see nature based learning established with the seven schools of the Education South-West Multi Academy Trust.



Insect and Climate Champions

Champions projects are led by young people, but we provide a range of tools and resources to help. Our Action for Insects, Climate Action and Marine Champion packs have been developed to help Champions learn about and be empowered to tackle our most pressing environmental issues.



What's next?

Over the next ten years our key goals are to:

- Ensure that learning in nature, with nature and about nature is core to every child's learning experience.
- Help young people from diverse backgrounds connect with nature and establish meaningful and lasting relationships with the natural world.
- Expand the reach of the project across the county and to different age groups – we want to see Wildlife Champions in every education setting and youth group in Devon.



Photo: Ross Hoddinott



- Support children, young people, community leaders and educators from all backgrounds to develop the skills and confidence they need to help nature; to get their voices heard; and to share their learning with others.
- Support the creation of wildlife friendly school grounds and local green spaces where natural learning opportunities can be accessed by all.
- Work with The Wildlife Trusts (TWTs) to develop nature based learning approaches, evidence its positive impact, and influence educational policy and curriculum development to have a greater emphasis on wildlife, biodiversity loss and climate change.



Get Involved!



Photo: Dave Tipling

Can you be part of our vision for wilder learning?

Our work to date has only been possible thanks to the support of DWT members, contributions from learning communities and from a range of funders. We need support if we are to deliver our vision. We are looking for more people to get involved and we need funding to expand our work with schools, to develop and deliver training for teachers and youth leaders, to establish a Youth Champions/Voice scheme, and to make informal nature based learning opportunities accessible to children and young people across the county.



If you are excited by our vision for wilder learning, there are a range of ways that you can get involved.

- **Donate to the project so that we can expand existing and develop new activities to achieve our goals.**
- **Promote nature based learning and develop Wildlife Champions in your learning community or community group.**
- **Make your school grounds or community green space better for nature and more accessible for learning.**



Please get in touch to find out more...

Contact **Paul Martin**: pmartin@devonwildlifetrust.org

Be part of our vision for a wilder Devon



**Devon
Wildlife Trust**

Over the next ten years, Devon Wildlife Trust wants to double the area of wildlife habitat on land and at sea. We want all Devon's soils, rivers, farmland and urban areas to be managed sustainably, so the air we breathe, the water we drink and the fields and streets we walk through make us healthier and happier. And we want at least a quarter of the population to be actively engaged in wildlife.

Our vision for a wilder Devon is ambitious and we cannot achieve it alone. We need the help of our members, volunteers, partners, funders...our community of supporters and everyone who cares about wildlife.

To find out more about the wider work of the Trust you can contact us at:

Tel **01392 254439**

Email **contactus@devonwildlifetrust.org**

Write to us at:

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Commercial Road
Exeter
EX2 4AB**



We're part of something bigger

Devon Wildlife Trust is part of The Wildlife Trusts - a national movement of independent charities involving people from a wide range of backgrounds, with a mission to restore at least a third of the UK's land and seas for nature by 2030. We believe everyone, everywhere, should have access to nature and be able to contribute towards its recovery.

No matter where you are in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people about nature and standing up for wildlife and wild places. Each Wildlife Trust is an independent charity formed and led by local people, who are working together to make a positive difference to wildlife, climate and future generations. Together we have more than 850,000 members, over 42,500 volunteers, 2,000 staff and 600 trustees.

Devon Wildlife Trust is a registered charity, number 213244
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