

3 Wildlife recording

BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

It is important to record and monitor wildlife in our parks and green spaces so we can identify any changes in the numbers of a certain species, and try and find a way to reduce the threats to species.

It can also be helpful to identify new or invasive species in the area, diseases and unusual behaviours etc.

Nature Talks

The Rangers often take a variety of animals and respective materials out to schools.

1. Animal skulls, life cycles, nests, skins
2. Live animals, caterpillars, reptiles

ACTIVITY 1 WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

Once upon a time people used to collect and stuff animals they found to save the memory. Nowadays you can use a camera to get some great wildlife records. Photos are very important for the identification of less well known wildlife.

Usually when you take a photo, you want to have the subject (flower etc.) in focus; this occurs when light from the subject is bent by the lens so it hits the same place on the film or sensor inside the camera.

Sometimes you need to move the lens backwards or forwards to achieve a clear, sharp image. This can be done by manually turning a ring around the lens or using an autofocus system that most modern cameras feature.



ACTIVITY 2 TRAIL CAMERAS

The main principle of a trail camera or camera trap is that it can be placed in remote areas not seen by people or wildlife. These cameras use motion sensors (like the lights people sometimes have in their front garden) so movement around the camera triggers the film. At Holywells we have cameras in our café that record movement.

Trail cameras are the most amazing camera technology of recent times. Most cameras require a human to operate it or mains power to power it. However, trail cameras are rugged, waterproof, self-powered, self-operated and can record video or photos, night or day onto internal memory.

They can be strapped to a tree or post and record every action 24/7, often for many weeks at a time. They are becoming very popular for many applications.

These can be set up easily in schools and there can be surprising footage of animals you wouldn't expect to find in school grounds performing interesting behaviour that you wouldn't see without the cameras.



ACTIVITY 3 FOOTPRINT TRAPS



INTRODUCTION

These can be set up in your school and are used to identify the types of animals that walk through an area based on the types of footprint found in the tunnel. The most common type of footprint tunnel is a black plastic triangle with a plastic insert. Pieces of A4 paper are attached to either end of the insert and ink or paint (non-toxic) is painted on either side of a plate of bait. Mammals (such as hedgehogs) come in to feed and then leave a trail of footprints as they leave. Other mammals which come to feed, including voles and mice, will also leave footprints.

Many small mammals' live nocturnal lives so are rarely seen. Identifying animal tracks and signs can open up an unseen world, providing a window into the lives of shy and elusive animals.

MATERIALS:

- Correx poster board
- Black poster paint
- Cable ties x3
- Scissors
- Dog food
- Tin opener
- Spoon
- Sharp knife
- White A4 paper
- Washing up liquid
- Paint brush
- Small bowl
- Sellotape
- Cling film (optional, see note at very end)
- J-cloth/old cloth
- Mammal footprint identification chart

INSTRUCTIONS

This activity begins by folding the poster board (60 cm X 80 cm) into three even sized panels. Follow the steps 1 to 8 below:

1. Using the sharp knife (adult only) pierce holes in each side of the tunnel. At the very end these holes will be threaded together with the cable ties (to hold the tunnel together) and so they should be opposite each other. Don't attach the cable ties or string yet
2. Fold the A4 paper to fit inside the tunnel and tape each edge down securely. Make sure not to tape across the middle of the sheets as the animal will be walking here
3. Cut the sponge cloth or J-cloth into two rectangular lengths and tape into position. Again do not tape across these
4. Squeeze some of the black paint onto the J-cloths and spread around using the paintbrush. This needs to stay damp for a number of days, so be generous
5. Place some dog food in the middle of the tunnel using the spoon
6. Place in a sheltered area of the school grounds, preferably lengthways along a hedgerow or under bushes for up to one week to monitor for hedgehogs and small mammals
7. When checking the tunnel, remove the cable ties using the scissors. Check if there are any footprints on the paper. If there are then carefully remove the paper. If not, maybe try a new location but check that the paint is still wet (if not add more) and put in more dog food.

STAY SAFE

- All poster paint used should be non-toxic - this is important for the children and also the animals
- Only an adult should use the knife
- Hands should be thoroughly washed after collecting the tunnel. This is best done by a teacher

REVIEW

Complete a project on mammals that are found nearby. What do they eat, what do they look like, is there any folklore associated with them, are they endangered? Turn it into a science experiment by creating a fair test.

Make a few mammal footprint traps. Try putting the trap in different locations or maybe use different types of food, for example peanut butter or a hot dog. Become a nature detective! Go outside and see which animals live nearby. What clues have they left behind? For example, dog footprints in mud etc. or make footprint stamps out of potatoes or sponge and make your own footprint trails.