EcoWild

You are Nature

Annual Report

2022-23

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10 Years of EcoWild

Back in 2012 I was aware that we all needed to get out in beautiful living spaces more and how helpful it was for my sanity. I had three young children at the time so began a woodland baby and toddler group called Nature Child. A few other intrepid mums joined and were willing to sit on the woodland floor while I poured hot chocolate out of a flask around a little fire and shared activities that our toddlers mostly ignored. Then Lucy, another parent, suggested we get together to take some bigger kids to the woods for adventures and fire-cooked sausages, and through this we formed EcoWild. We started sharing this love for the living world in local schools as their Forest School provision, and in 2015 when the B&NES Wellbeing College began as a pilot we moved into adult courses too. I'd worked in Community HIV services and with NHS partnerships for tropical health projects and through these had become sensitised to the burdens people carry all the time, just below the surface. I knew that coming back to our belonging in nature is a powerful way of changing perspective and regaining our strength - and that as a species on track for self-destruction through overshoot, we couldn't come back to nature soon enough.

10 years and a whole world of people, projects, partnerships and experiences later and I am still delighted and filled with awe by the immensity of the beauty and diversity of life that I get to encounter with groups on every session I run. I absolutely love the reflections and connections that emerge between people, and how the roundhouse at Greyfield Wood has become a strong base for this.

We are always working for integration and collaboration to create a thriving future for all. I envision nature-based practices being routinely and widely offered and accessed so that we support everyone to feel well and shift away from polluting the water table with prescribed medicines wherever possible.It's exciting to see that the wake-up call of the climate emergency has in some places shaken off the apathy that exists in 'mature' economies such as ours, where so much is taken for granted. Many more sectors of society are actively asking what changes their field needs to make, and innovative thinking is everywhere. There is a groundswell of interest and belief in the space EcoWild creates because it puts us on a path to play our role in the Great Turning towards a thriving future. Whatever the next phase brings, I hold gratitude and respect for all that we have right now as EcoWild and all those involved.

Emily Malik

Director

Summary

In 2022-23, as we approached a decade in existence, we consolidated partnerships to create ever more strategic and integrated impact in the local VCSE and statutory landscape for Nature and Health. The evidence base for this approach is solid and ever-increasing, and our data shows that the public benefit from this provision is significant. The slow business of building awareness and engagement, to the point where nature-based interventions are consistently offered and accessible as part of all health frameworks, is our ongoing long term task. We offered a varied, high quality and well-appreciated portfolio of courses and events this year.

Our work with children and families contributes to whole community wellbeing and nature connectedness: creating opportunities for knowing the living world at a young age is a vital part of what we do. This year the team has continued to deliver their hugely inspirational and engaging sessions for a wide range of children and families: engagement has increased and we are often at full capacity for our Holiday Adventure Club. Participants have been able to build relationships and enact their own ideas in a space that supports curiosity, creativity, perseverance and problem solving. With the support of a new partnership with local organisation Co-forest, we were able to ensure the sustainability of our weekly toddler group Wild Ones and celebrate the special community of parents and carers involved.

Two key partnerships - with The Community Farm and Somer Valley Rediscovered - have secured funding to continue for the next two years, allowing us to embed and integrate positive outcomes for more adults in our wellbeing courses. The approach has lasting impact and there is scope for ever more people to benefit. Our partnership with Groundwork South has continued to support refugees and non EU migrants' integration into the living landscape and beyond built spaces. The BaNES Wellbeing Courses service commissioned EcoWild to run regular courses throughout the year across all of our sites.

This year EcoWild has benefited hugely from having an Office Manager / Project Assistant who has oversight of communications and has established systems to enable smoother flow in our overall portfolio. This improved visibility has been commented on by our community and the systemisation has meant the whole team has been able to relax into a greater consistency in our operations.

376 participants	261 sessions	7,656 engagements

Funding & Partners

Our adult wellbeing programme was delivered with thanks to funding from B&NES Public Health COMF fund, West of England Combined Authority (WECA), HCRG Care Group (BaNES Wellbeing Courses), Healthier With Nature and Bath Mind.

Our special partnerships continued with The Community Farm and Combe Hay Vineyard. A new partnership was established with local organisation Co-forest who generously supported our weekly toddler group Wild Ones.

We ran 2 walks as part of Bristol Walk Fest 2023.

Regular participating organisations who engaged with the programme again this year included Mentoring Plus and Mencap. We facilitated a team volunteering day for DEFRA.

EcoWild Team

Emily Malik, Owain Jones and Yvonne Bignall continued as Directors.

Our team of practitioners were Dominika Baran, Gabriella Gordon-Watson, Nick Hudson, Helen Mattock, Becca Quirk and Clare Stepan.

Sarah Parkes joined in August 2022 in the new role of Project Assistant / Virtual Office Manager.

With thanks to our volunteers: Elyshia, Emily, Rosie, Sam and the Business Analyst team at DEFRA .

Children & Families

Our provision for children and families is at the heart of our work and continued this year to provide familiarity and joy in the natural world for many children and families in the local area.

Schools

We delivered on-site outdoor learning across 4 terms (**25** sessions) for **104** pupils at Farrington Gurney Primary School and the full academic year (**37** sessions) for **151** pupils at St Mary's C of E Primary School in Timsbury.

Wild Ones

Our weekly Wild Ones toddler group is our longest running group and offers under 5s and their parents/carers the opportunity to get out into the woods and connect with nature through games, song, exploration and art and craft activities. We delivered **38** sessions across the year for around **20** families.

Holiday Adventure Club

Our Holiday Adventure Club continues to grow in popularity and we now have an established group of children who regularly attend across the year, building their confidence in and knowledge of nature and the outdoors.

The Holiday Club ran in the summer break, October half term, Easter break and May half term to offer the chance for sustained engagement across the year.

Woodland Birthday Parties

Our Woodland Birthday Parties offer 2 hours of games and exploration in Greyfield Wood. We ran **10** birthday parties for **115** children across the year.

Other Sessions

We delivered sessions for Southdown Little Stars Toddler Group and Mentoring Plus.

Children & Families

Impact

We all felt a greater sense of interconnection with nature at Wild Ones.

Average 9.7/10

We experienced a sense of community and/or support at Wild Ones.

Average 9.7/10

77% of Holiday Club survey respondents reported that their child/ren displayed a greater interest in or knowledge of nature after the sessions.

77% of Holiday Club survey respondents reported that their child/ren's confidence with others improved as a result of attending the sessions.

69% of Holiday Club survey respondents reported that their child/ren learned new skills at the sessions.

They came home every day muddy and tired and delighted. They particularly loved making things with clay. They immediately asked that I book them in again for their next school holidays.

My son thrives at EcoWild. He absolutely loves it and learns so much. The leaders are so capable, knowledgable, gentle and kind. It is the best nature group around.

My 7 year old absolutely loved whittling short spears. This was a new activity to him and he loved the independence and responsibility he was given.

The way you hold the group is brilliant. You create a calm, knowledgeable and inclusive space. The fire lighting was a real highlight I think and it's always amazing to see the children persevering for so long. The silences as everyone just took a moment in the woods were magical.

Children & Families

Adult Wellbeing

Groundwork South IMPACT Project and The Community Farm

IMPACT Bristol, part of Groundwork South's TOGETHER programme, is a project to enable the cultural integration of non EU migrants and refugees. EcoWild recognises the importance of this happening beyond the built environment: everyone needs to belong to the air, the soil and the water too.

In this second year of the project participants came from Sudan, Turkey, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The EcoWild sessions included breath-work, relaxation, and familiarisation with the trees, flowers and other wildlife. Gaining understanding of the living world in England through discussion around ancient trees, culinary, medicinal and folklore of the living world was a route to belonging in the land and sharing stories of the lands they have known with each other. This is a stark contrast to the predominantly urban experiences of immigrant populations: the project sought to remove barriers to this knowing and belonging in nature. A lot of joy was unearthed in the process.

Autumn and Spring sessions (totalling 12 days) were delivered at The Community Farm with a balance of farming / food security (TCF) and nature connectedness and knowledge of the natural world (EcoWild). An additional 10 City Nature sessions were delivered in Royal Fort Gardens, Troopers Hill, Blaise Castle Estate, Brandon Hill, Stoke Park, Arnos Vale and Ashton Court.

Adult Wellbeing

Groundwork South IMPACT Project

I'm so happy to have the chance to come back here again. The smell of the yurt made me happy. It feels like going back to grandmother's house maybe: in my mind it's like I used to live here. Maybe I should move here, out of the city. Listening to Emmy saying about paying attention to birds and wind feels very special. Today my ears automatically tuned into the channel of the wind. Usually I don't like that sound but today feels very soft.

When I arrive here, I smell the wood chips. When I sit I smell the grass. After stretching and meditation I can discharge any negative feelings or pressure that has been building up. I feel reborn and so amazing.

This place is like another family: every time I come here I have so much love and hugs. I feel recharged and ready to go home.

Today is amazing. I worked hard and I feel healthier and stronger than before.

Food was all delicious: soup, beans and bread. We enjoyed the planting and my daughter could get involved. Felt tired after working in the sun so we rested for a while. Thank you for the activity, the food and the workout.

Adult Wellbeing

NatureWell with Bath Mind

In partnership with local mental health charity Bath Mind we delivered a 6-week NatureWell course in spring 2023. **10** people participated in a course that journeyed through the 5 Pathways to Nature Connectedness. Each week focussed on one of the 5 pathways to nature connectedness; Contact, Beauty, Emotion, Compassion, Meaning/ Purpose.

> All the facilitators and other attendees have been supportive, provided a listening ear and not at all judgemental. I have felt comfortable to be me - quiet and contemplative when needed but also able to chat and express myself when it has suited. Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend these sessions.

> I was just thinking back to myself at the start of this: I had never done something like this at all. Over the weeks this session has become something I don't want to do without. I have learnt so much.

> I have found the course peaceful, calming, grounding, enjoyable and educational. It has given me an even greater appreciation for the value of being outdoors and for sitting and just being.

Adult Wellbeing

Lakeside Wellbeing, Woodland Connect & Nature's Respite

Our Lakeside Wellbeing, Woodland Connect and Nature's Respite courses use the Mind, Movement, Creativity framework. Each course starts in the morning with mindfulness practice, includes movement such as Tree Yoga and Tai Chi, and offers the chance for creative self expression using natural materials in the afternoon.

60 people took part in **5** courses of 6 weeks between September and June. They joined the sessions with a variety of mental and physical health reasons with the aim of connecting with nature; finding stillness; learning new skills; meeting new people; improving mobility; achieving a greater sense of calm; a space for reflection; to feel better mentally; improving anxiety.

I suffer from SAD and doing the Lakeside Wellbeing course in the run up to Xmas was brilliant for getting me out the house to get some fresh air and the all important daylight when I'd usually be going into hibernation mode. I feel doing the course has had a massive positive affect on how I've coped this winter.

This works: connection to self, each other and the land.

The course gave me ways to remember to give myself time and take time to notice things I would otherwise miss in the busy times. Having had the experience of the course with you, and the lovely people who attended, I honestly feel has meant what seemed pretty hopeless at times has been something I could deal with. For this I can not thank you enough.

I was really ill and you did so much for me and now I'm better! I was bed-bound, I couldn't leave the house, I couldn't do anything. And now I'm feeling so good.

I've loved this. I feel like I can breathe again.

Adult Wellbeing

BaNES Wellbeing Courses

The BaNes Wellbeing Courses provided by HCRG Care Group is a free service for the local community. The courses are delivered by a range of partners and are designed to help participants be more active, build confidence, learn new skills, manage overall wellbeing and connect with other people along the way.

Across the year we delivered **7** courses for **57** participants.

Willow Basket Making

Deep Relaxation with Yoga Nidra

Men's Woodland Project Group

Summer Woodland & Field Walks

It was fantastic! The location added to the specialness.

I was recommended the group by my therapist. Prior to attending I was unable to speak to strangers and suffered with extreme stammering. By attending I have felt comfortable in the presence of others for the first time in over two years. This course has been vital to my recovery. I cannot thank the team at EcoWild enough.

Thanks for another lovely session today, you hold such a beautiful space and I'm so grateful to be able to be there!

What a magical walk, we are surrounded by so much beauty!

The way you teach weaving is really helpful. I think I've been taught before but always focussed on getting it right. Actually I think its quite instinctive, quite creative. And you help me enjoy it that way.

Adult Wellbeing

Impact

'I felt a sense of oneness with the natural world around me.'

Average 8.7/10

'This course helped me to think of the natural world as a community to which I belong.'

Average 8.7/10

'Think back to your reason for taking part. How well did these EcoWild sessions help you achieve this?'

Average 8.3/10

80% of participants reported that the EcoWild programme gave them an increased sense of community or friendships.

64% of participants reported an increase in knowledge or skills as the result of taking part in EcoWild sessions.

56% of participants felt less worried or anxious as a result of taking part in an EcoWild programme.

56% of participants reported an increased sense of motivation/energy or less fatigue and/or an increased ability to deal with problems.

Other Workshops & Events

To enable a broad range of people to participate our portfolio of offers included one-off experience walks, a group on Deep Ecology and soul/ spirit, Woodland Dance, meditation and yoga as well as our wonderful Seasonal Celebrations

Woodland People

We ran **8** Woodland People sessions at Greyfield Woods. The group is small (up to 6 people) and creates community for those who have been on the frontline of the Climate and Ecological Emergencies for much of their lives. Its an important space to reconnect with the deep resourcing available from practice and discussion as kin.

Deep Time & Foraging Walks

3 walks were led, 2 as part of Bristol Walkfest. The groups were taught about the folklore, medicinal and culinary uses of the plants and fungi around us, and how they tie us to the past and future. In the Deep Time Walks, an even longer stretch of time - back to earth's beginnings - provided the structure of the journey to the standing stones at Stanton Drew.

Middle Eastern Dance

2 hugely enjoyable afternoons of dancing and learning about Middle Eastern dance styles were held in summer and autumn at Greyfield Wood, led by Raheesha of the Desert Divas. We connected to the ancient female art form for relaxation and celebrating fertility, drawing on earth and tree energies.

Evening Woodland Yoga & Meditation

We held **3** evening yoga and meditation sessions in Greyfield Wood.

Seasonal Celebrations

We held gatherings in the roundhouse at Greyfield Wood to celebrate the Autumn Equinox, Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox. Participants of all ages from the local community were invited to share a story, poem, reading, song or piece of music or were welcome to just listen in the company of others by the fire.

Other Workshops & Events

People loved it, a real community. It was wonderful telling stories. I really enjoyed the audience participation and the little ones were delightfully themselves.

Thank you for putting so much heart and soul into creating a sacred and safe space.

I was amazed at how impactful that was, it made me see everything differently. I didn't know what to expect before I came but I have been surprised at how much I've learnt and felt.

Looking Forward

As a Community Interest Company our focus is always on environmental and social justice, and where we can best act to redress imbalance and contribute to flourishing life. The core vision for this doesn't change, but as we adapt to meet the ever-changing conditions around us there is opportunity to review and evolve the details.

The floods, droughts and crop failures around the world that are a result of climate breakdown have contributed to steadily rising costs of food here in the UK over the past year. As stealthy changes are not as extreme as the devastating effects that people on the frontline of climate and ecological collapse are facing it is easy to miss the connection between this and the system of industrial consumption and overshoot that we are embedded within and that is causing it.

When we come to know our living world more closely, we are able to care for it as our wider community and to know our interdependence. That is where EcoWild acts, to enable lived experiences of our reciprocal relationship with all life. From this place we can make informed choices and act on behalf of current and future generations.

And yet in practice, the ever more volatile climate may act on our provision in the opposite way, to reduce people's interaction with their environment because of fears of heat and floods, storms and high winds. The very reason EcoWild exists - to enable our best response to a rapidly changing climate - might be undermined by the coming of that phenomenon. For now the impact is small: we rarely have to cancel sessions because of the weather and we are always supporting people to develop habits of enjoying the outdoors in all seasons. We still hold solidarity with those losing their homes and livelihoods in other parts of our interconnected world of course.

The opportunity we still have is to celebrate and amplify the beautiful simplicity and power of our deep belonging in and as nature and to build on this to create stronger communities, relieve pressure on frontline health services, and create a more positive future. Where our attention goes, so follows action and change. We are looking to the living world and dedicating our full awareness, appreciation and willingness her way.

Emily Malik

Director