

# The Wild Trax Project

## Exploring Youth Engagement with Nature in Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire



Partnership project between Berks, Bucks, & Oxon Wildlife Trust, Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, and Natural History Museum, Tring



Supported by

ROTHSCHILD FOUNDATION

What We've Been Up To...



**82,800**  
impressions on  
Wild Trax twitter

engaged with over  
**2,800**  
young people

delivered over  
**50**  
outdoor  
experiences

sustained  
engagement with  
**138**  
young people

**8**  
school  
assemblies

through our projects,  
young people raised  
**£844**  
for BBOWT

**2**  
community  
wildlife projects

**9**  
workshops and  
career talks in  
schools



connected young  
people to  
**21**  
wildlife  
professionals



**4**  
school  
partnerships

secured  
**£7,660**  
in additional funding  
for sub-projects



## Introduction

The Wild Trax project was devised in partnership between Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and Natural History Museum at Tring, with funding provided by the Rothschild Foundation. The purpose of the project was to explore methods of engaging young people (aged 11-18) with their local wildlife and bring about conservation benefits through its delivery.

## Aims

1. Give young people the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge of the natural environment and information about careers and training opportunities, which can be used to contribute to the conservation sector and local communities.
2. Empower young people to take action to conserve, monitor and enhance key habitats and wildlife sites, gaining valuable work experience.
3. Help young people to have a greater connection to nature, improve their physical and mental well-being and increase their self-confidence.
4. Increase community awareness of the natural environment through improvements to their natural settings accomplished by young people.
5. Enable The Wildlife Trusts, schools and other conservation and youth organisations to learn from the project's partnership approach to developing young people and securing skills for the future of wildlife conservation and management in their areas. Results and information will be shared through The Wildlife Trusts and NHM's internal communications and developed as a useful case study.



## Youth-led Principle

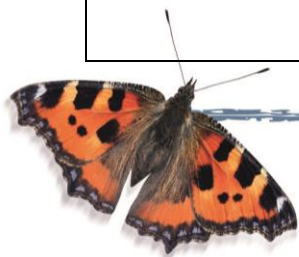
Wild Trax was predominantly youth-led. Young people were a key consultee for activity and evaluation research and in monitoring the project. Through the project, participants were encouraged to make their own decisions and take responsibility for activities.

Originally, Wild Trax intended to support young people to run their own wildlife projects. However few individuals signed up to independent taster sessions, or chose to run projects. As such, the project has largely engaged with young people through schools and youth organisations.



Delivery

Key Group	Project Involvement	Analysis	Key Learnings
<b>Mandeville School Y8 Science Classes</b>	Lessons to design a wildlife garden for their school. Total contact time: 3 hours	On average, agreement with “My enjoyment of nature is an important part of who I am” increased during project. There was little change in response to any other statement.	Projects like Wild Trax have the potential to increase young people’s intrinsic appreciation of nature. Length of engagement may have been too short to be associated with large attitude changes.
<b>Mandeville After School Club</b>	Set up & supported club to create wildlife garden Total contact time: 18 ½ hours	Trends in questionnaire responses suggested that students’ enjoyment of nature, environmental awareness and self-confidence slightly increased.	Better to set up clubs in January than mid-autumn term; gives longer promotion time. Good to have support of more than one staff member to ensure club runs regularly.
<b>Tring School Outdoor Classroom</b>	Helped students make outdoor classroom more wildlife-friendly. Visits to partner sites. Total contact time: 12 ¼ hours	This group preferred learning outdoors than in classrooms. They showed the greatest change in agreement with questionnaire statements and most regularly engaged with nature beyond Wild Trax. Students found that nature helped them focus, find comfort and have a break from everyday life. Large decrease in agreement with “nature is boring”.	Youth nature projects have the potential to alleviate some of the struggles facing young people, and increase their capacities to concentrate and learn. Regular, sustained engagement achieves impact.
<b>Action 4 Youth’s NCS group</b>	Wildlife project in Aylesbury town centre for National Citizen Service (NCS). Total contact time: 12 hours	Questionnaire trends and feedback indicated increased enjoyment and connection with nature. Local people very interested in project.	This type of project has a wider impact on community.
<b>One-off Sessions</b>	Delivering one-off trips and programmes for young people.	Over 40% of participants who completed questionnaires about these trips felt that their understanding of the natural world and conservation had improved “quite a lot” or more.	We delivered valuable sessions that helped young people to learn about, and connect with nature. One-off events can act as a stepping stone for further delivery and improved conservation awareness.



## Evaluation

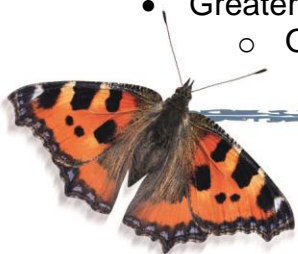
Aim (in brief)		Outcome
1.	Give young people the opportunity to gain skills & knowledge of the natural environment, careers & training, to contribute to the conservation sector & local communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduced participants to conservation sector through talks, practical work &amp; access to experts</li> <li>Activities developed; responsibility, decision-making, teamwork, leadership &amp; communication</li> <li>Some participants considering outdoor careers</li> </ul>
2.	Empower young people to take action to conserve, monitor and enhance key habitats and wildlife sites, gaining valuable work experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students of Tring School, The Mandeville School &amp; Bucks UTC took action to improve school grounds for wildlife</li> <li>Young people on Action 4 Youth's Inspiration &amp; NCS Programmes managed habitats for wildlife on a nature reserve and in a town centre.</li> </ul>
3.	Help young people to have a greater connection to nature, improve their physical and mental well-being and increase their self-confidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questionnaire results indicated that participants connected with nature and gained self-confidence</li> <li>Programmes had practical elements, encouraging applied, physical conservation work</li> </ul>
4.	Increase community awareness of the natural environment through improvements to their natural settings accomplished by young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Mandeville School's wildlife garden and Action 4 Youth's NCS project attracted attention from local people and improved areas for wildlife.</li> </ul>
5.	Enable The Wildlife Trusts (TWT), schools and other organisations to learn from the project. Results and information shared through TWT and NHM's internal communications and developed as a case study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media used throughout project to communicate ongoing activities and youth work</li> <li>Project reported on in multiple formats;               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Detailed report for partners and funders</li> <li>Summary report available to public</li> <li>Blog and video on BBOWT website</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Additional Success

- Built a reputation for providing valuable wildlife experiences for young people
  - Organisations we worked with wanted more Wild Trax sessions & activities
  - Project legacy: relationships and programmes will be continued by partners
- Supported small groups of young people, including those less academically focused, providing new ways for individuals to learn and achieve, with potential health benefits

## Recommendations

- Find way to engage with under 14s without parental/ school supervision
  - Less exam pressure on under 14s, no clash with Duke of Edinburgh award (starts at 14) = this age group may have more free time for activities/ project
- Separate 11-18 into two age groups due to disparity in abilities and interests
  - Suggested: 11-14 and 14-18
- Regularly engage with participating groups for greatest impact
  - Further study needed to determine how often - likely to differ between groups
- Simplify evaluation; long, written questionnaires may not be suitable for this age
- Greater social media presence
  - On platforms most used by audience – Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat



*“Thank you for an amazing trip... it has really opened my eyes on how I can contribute to the environment and its inhabitants”- Bucks UTC student on Action 4 Youth’s Inspiration Programme*



*“The experience as a whole has improved my confidence in presenting which will help me in work and helped me care more about the environment”- Bucks UTC student on Action 4 Youth’s Inspiration Programme*



*I liked that we were outside the whole time”- NCS participant*



*“I wanted to make a change... have fun and do something which will make a difference” - After School Club member on joining Wild Trax*

*“I really enjoyed helping to construct the bird boxes and making a difference to the local environment”- NCS participant*



*“The Wild Trax project has been great for the students in the Outdoor Classroom. They tend to be students who don’t have a breadth of life experiences.*

*The work we have done with Wild Trax has broadened their horizons and made them realise that there is a world to be enjoyed outside of the town. This has been achieved with a range of activities as well as positive interactions with staff who act as excellent role models.*

*They like being outside and some are considering careers 'not in an office' now” - Teacher, Tring School*

