



Bringing Nature Back to my Back Yard:

A journey to rediscover,
explore and rewild my garden
space.

2314177

Digital Scrapbook – John
Muir Award Experience

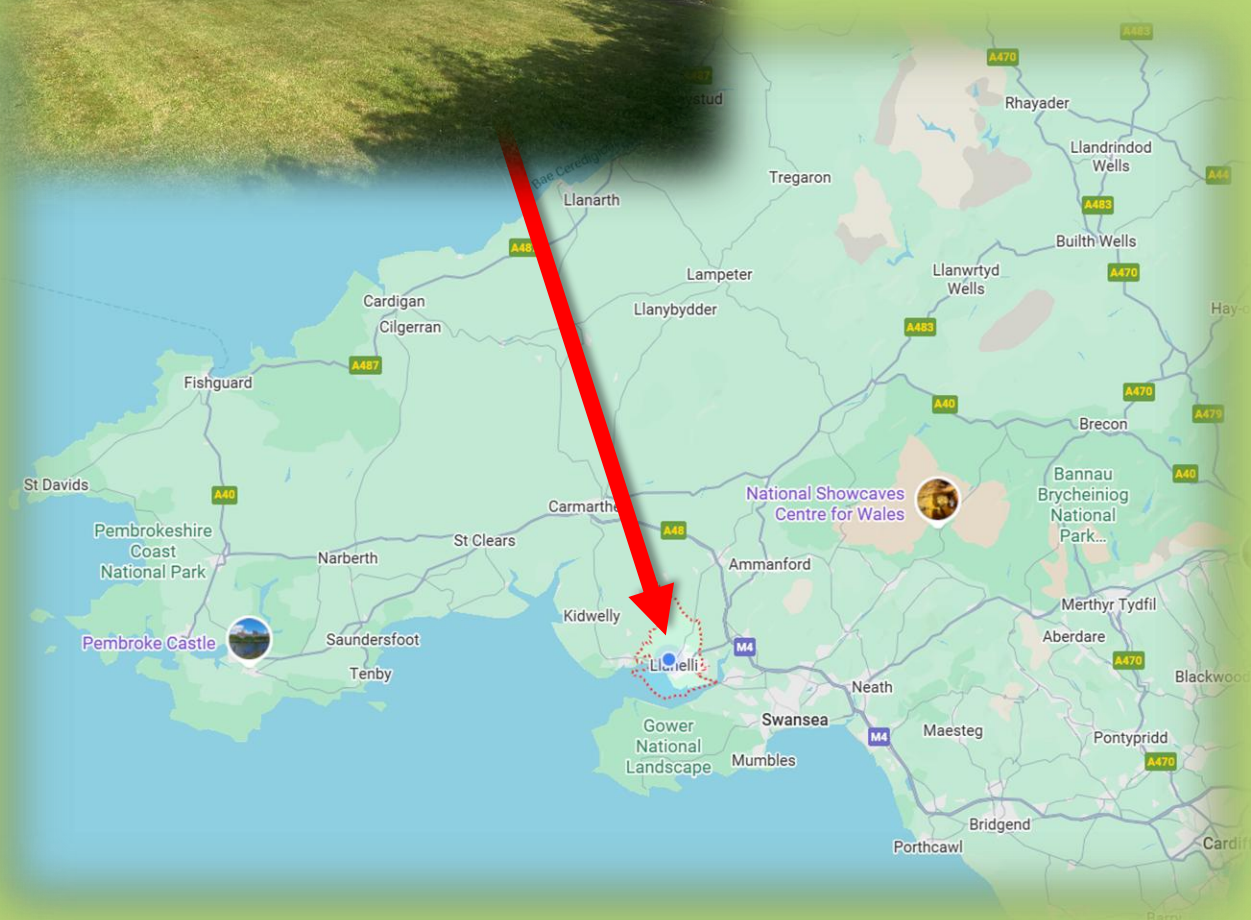
Where It All Began...



This back garden in **Llanelli, South Wales**, was the starting point for my John Muir Award journey.

Once an ordinary and slightly overgrown domestic space, it has been transformed into a vibrant garden for wildlife and discovery. Through this project, I wanted to reimagine the garden not just as a private space, but as a meaningful, local site of conservation, learning, and sustainable practice.

What began as a personal challenge soon became a deeply reflective exploration of how even small, familiar environments can nurture awe, curiosity, and connection.



A Garden I Thought I Knew...



Before I made any changes, I wanted to see what was already thriving here. I took my time walking around, peeking into corners, crouching down under shrubs, and just... watching.

I spotted signs of life I hadn't really noticed before - buzzing bees, colourful berries, flowering plants and secret hideaways tucked beneath the trees. It felt like nature was already here, just waiting to be noticed.



A secret space under the bushes – perfect for hedgehogs or curious little frogs.

Bright blossoms still going strong – the garden wasn't as bare as I thought



Wild berries! I hadn't realised how much food nature was already offering here.



Buzzing bees already making themselves at home – always a good sign!

Looking a Little Closer...



We spotted a snail basking in the evening sun, as still as a statue, but definitely alive – a tiny moment of stillness in motion.



We ran our fingers across the bark – rough, peeling, and full of hidden cracks. Could anything live in there?



Under the stones, we found a whole hidden world – ants, slugs, and wriggling woodlice. A secret underworld in the soil. The damp soil under the rocks was full of life – perfect for hiding, wriggling, or burrowing.



We crouched and peeked, searching for webs, wings, or even a frog!



It took a while to see it – a spider's delicate web strung between the leaves, almost invisible in the light.

More Than Meets the Eye...



A soft feather nestled in the grass – proof that the garden had feathery visitors, even if I didn't see them come or go.



It looked like a streak of electric blue hovering in the air – a damselfly resting on a flower, barely noticeable until I paused to look closer.



At first glance, it was just a garden – grass, a few flowers, maybe the odd bee or two. But the longer I stayed still, the more I noticed. There was a whole hidden world unfolding around me. None of it shouted for attention, but it was all there – delicate, beautiful, and waiting to be seen. The garden wasn't just green space. It was alive with tiny treasures I'd never taken the time to notice before.

Almost invisible until it caught the light, a perfect spiral web shimmered between branches – home to a patient little spider.





Signs of Life...



Something had been busy here. These leaves were full of holes, a silent sign of tiny night-time visitors with big appetites!



The bees were hard at work, darting between lavender flowers with determination. Their constant hum felt like the soundtrack of summer.



I spotted a tiny snail shell resting on the stone – no snail inside, just a delicate reminder that life had passed through here before.

Even when everything seemed still, nature had left its calling cards behind. The Hosta leaves were full of little holes – a quiet clue that something had been feasting here overnight. A snail shell rested quietly on the stone, empty now, but a tiny echo of life once passing through. A woodlouse scurried over the gravel like a miniature armoured explorer, while bees buzzed through the lavender, happily busy in the sunshine. The garden was full of traces – clues, movements, memories – each one whispering that this space was anything but empty.



We watched a woodlouse navigating the gravel like a tiny armoured explorer – every stone an obstacle, every crevice a hiding place.



An empty corner full of potential.

From Sandbox to Sanctuary!

This little corner of the garden had always been sunny but overlooked – a scattering of gravel, a rusting bench, and a few pots that never quite thrived. But with a little imagination (and a lot of pebbles), it became something more.

I didn't dig, design, or spend much – just reused an old plastic sandpit, laid down a pond liner, and gathered river pebbles and rocks from around the garden. Slowly, a pond began to take shape. I added native pond plants, repurposed terracotta pots for shelter, and tucked wildflowers and herbs nearby to support pollinators and sloped slates and pebbles for an easy access entrance and exit.

I didn't expect it to feel so special – but as the water settled and the sunlight bounced off the surface, it really did. Now, this little patch hums with quiet possibility – a future home for frogs, bugs, and imagination alike.



The turtle gets a second life!



Holding the liner down with pebbles while we filled the pond



Starting to look like something real!



Plants in and ready – now we wait for wildlife!



Finishing touches with river pebbles and pots.



A perfect froggy paradise!

Tucked In and Treetop Ready!



I wanted to make space for more than just frogs and bugs – I wanted the garden to offer shelter for our pricklier and furrier visitors too.

I nestled a woven hedgehog house into the undergrowth, making sure it was tucked into a quiet, shady corner with plenty of cover. It's hidden but still accessible, with a clear path in and out – just in case a spiky little lodger comes looking for somewhere to hibernate.

Meanwhile, higher up in the garden, I built and placed a special nesting box for squirrels. It came flat-packed, so I assembled it by hand, added nesting material inside, and mounted it high in a sturdy pine tree, away from disturbance.

Even if it takes time for visitors to move in, just creating these spaces felt rewarding – like sending out an open invitation to wildlife.



This border already felt wild and tangled – perfect for a secret shelter.



A woven hideaway for our spikey friends – tucked away and ready.



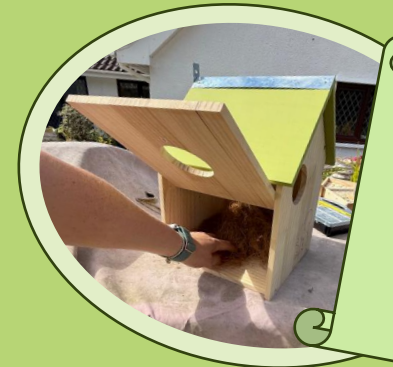
Flat-pack fun! Time to get building



Getting it up high and out of reach – prime real estate for squirrels!



Now we wait to see who moves in...



Tucking some cosy nesting material inside.



Spotted: our first guest at the hedgehog hotel!

We wanted to give the tiniest garden visitors a place to stay too – and a bug hotel felt like just the thing! It arrived flat-packed (again!), so we rolled up our sleeves and got to work.

My daughter helped me build it from scratch – carefully piecing together each layer of pinecones, bamboo, straw, and bark to create little nooks for different species. We did some research beforehand to find out what makes the perfect insect hotel: a dry, sheltered spot, low to the ground, with a sunny face and access to nearby plants.



Little hands, big help – building the bug hotel together!

Once built, we placed it against a south-facing wall, nestled among the ivy and flowers. We're hoping to welcome solitary bees, beetles, and ladybirds – all of which play a vital role in pollination and natural pest control.

Even if it takes time for residents to move in, it already feels like this little hotel belongs here. And the best part? It was a hands-on way to learn about bugs and biodiversity together.

Booked into the Bug Hotel!



All set up and ready for visitors!



Surrounded by ivy and flowers – prime bug real estate!



We researched the perfect spot – south-facing, sheltered, and dry.



Tucked into a wild patch of the garden – just how the bugs like it.

Did you know? Solitary bees like red mason bees don't sting and are amazing pollinators – they love bug hotels with small bamboo tubes!

Feathered Friends Welcome!



The Bird Box

I wanted to encourage birds to nest safely, so I installed a wooden bird box in a quiet part of the garden. Beforehand, I researched what makes the ideal setup:— around 2–4 metres high— facing between north and east to avoid strong sunlight and rain— and leaving it completely empty, just how they like it! It's tucked into a tree with good cover from predators.



Checked in and waiting for guests!

A single bird can eat thousands of garden pests every week — feeding them helps biodiversity thrive!

Peanuts, seeds and suet — something for everyone



Self-serve dining!



The Feeding Station

I set up a feeding station in a sunny patch, with a mix of hanging feeders for seeds, peanuts, and fat balls. I've tried to offer a good variety for different birds — and it's quickly become a regular pit stop! Keeping it topped up has become part of our morning routine.

The Bird Bath

For drinking and splashing, I added a classic stone bird bath in a quiet corner near some shrubs. Birds need fresh water as much as food — especially in warmer weather or during nesting season.



Feather spa in session...

The Garden Gets Chirpy!



Taking a
break after
breakfast.

The garden's
friendliest
visitor -
always nearby.

Seen: Every day this week
Fact: Only the males are black
- females are brown!



House
hunting? This
one looks
promising!

Seen: 5th July
Fact: Blue tits can raise
up to 16 chicks in one
nest!

Seen: Often, especially
in the mornings
Fact: Robins are
fiercely territorial,
even though they look
sweet.

It didn't take long for our feathered neighbours to notice!

We've spotted robins, blackbirds, and even a blue tit checking out the bird box. Watching them dart between the trees, feeders, and bath has been magical, and a great way to slow down and tune in with nature.

The quiet corner
where it all
happens.



Bringing it All Together – Inspired by John Muir

John Muir (1838–1914) was a Scottish-American naturalist, writer and conservationist who helped inspire the modern environmental movement. He believed deeply in the importance of wild places and spent much of his life exploring, protecting and campaigning for nature.

He was one of the founders of America's national parks and a passionate advocate for people of all ages to connect with the natural world. Like Muir, we believe that even small spaces – like our garden – can make a big difference. Through building habitats, observing wildlife and learning as a family, we've followed in his footsteps by helping to protect and enjoy nature close to home.

We used the John Muir Trust Resource Guide to help us understand his legacy and values. It inspired us to think more deeply about how we can protect and share the nature around us. Completing this project has helped us notice, appreciate and care for the nature around us – and we feel proud to be continuing John Muir's legacy, one small step at a time.

“In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks”
– John Muir

