

The John Muir Award 2022

Alexis Bater

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Discover.....

The area I discovered for the John Muir award was the back garden of my family home. The garden had a significant impact upon my childhood experiences when it was my grandparents home and I hope that in the future my children will also have fond memories and consider our garden to be a special place. When I was a child in the 80's the whole back of the garden was filled with trees, we used to call it our forest and we spent much of our time hiding in the trees, climbing, making dens and using our imaginations. My grandfather took great pride in the garden and worked hard to make it look immaculate – he used to mow vertical lines into the lawn which he said was better than Wimbledon tennis courts! In the late 90's the trees were removed and replaced with a decking area as that was the height of fashion at the time. Unfortunately my grandfather passed away unexpectedly in 2018 and while we tried to maintain the lawn to some extent, we simply didn't have the time or knowledge to care for the garden, to grow plants or to keep the lines in the lawn!



Last year, myself and my husband decided to purchase the property from my grandmother.

We are in the process of building a new extension so that my grandmother, us and our two sons can live together comfortably. These photos were taken at the beginning of the year before the build started, and during this time we have let the garden.....

..... grow WILD!



Explore....

While the building works have been carried out the garden has grown absolutely wild! Now I must admit that before I started the John Muir projects, this to me just looked like one huge mess, and I worried how much it will cost to sort it all out. My grandmother and I were considering creating an artificial lawn as we have in our front garden which requires almost no maintenance and always looks neat and tidy. However, what we discovered during this process has completely changed our minds.

During my first exploration visit, I began to take photographs as I noticed amongst the long grass were various wildflowers. The colours of the flowers were just beautiful, white, purple, red, orange, pink, yellow and not something that I had ever paid attention to before. I noticed there were patches of tall daisy's and what amazed me was how big they were. We have always had daisies in the garden but they were always very small, these had grown as tall as my knee. I noticed the bees landing on the flowers and I noticed various insects flying around them. I researched the names of the wildflowers and discovered on the Wildlife Trust website that they provide precious nectar for the insects. The Woodland Trust website states that meadows and grassland provide a haven for wildlife, as insects such as bees and butterflies rely on the pollinating flowers, birds and small mammals rely on the insects and some of the plants. However, this type of area is scarce due to land being cleared for construction, agricultural use and heavy recreational use, therefore, it is vital that we do more to care for and safeguard such areas, without it our wildlife in the UK is at risk.

Beautiful wildflowers





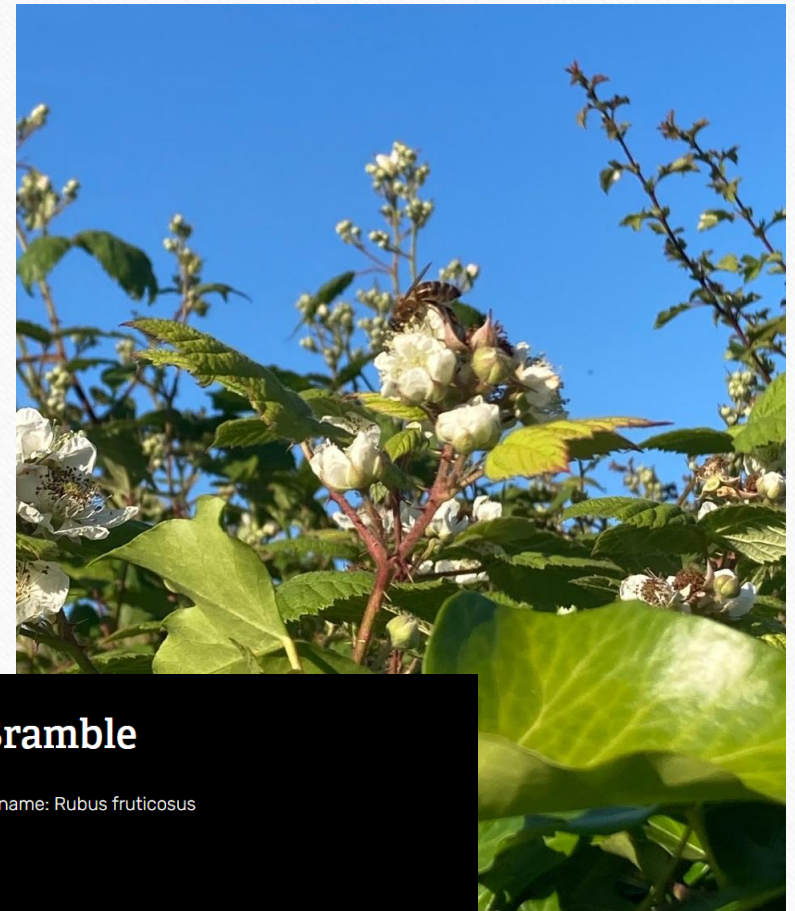
Daisy – *Bellis Perennis*

Flowers March-October.
Easily recognisable flower with
a yellow centre and numerous
white petals. Abundant in short
grass such as parks and
garden lawns.









Bramble

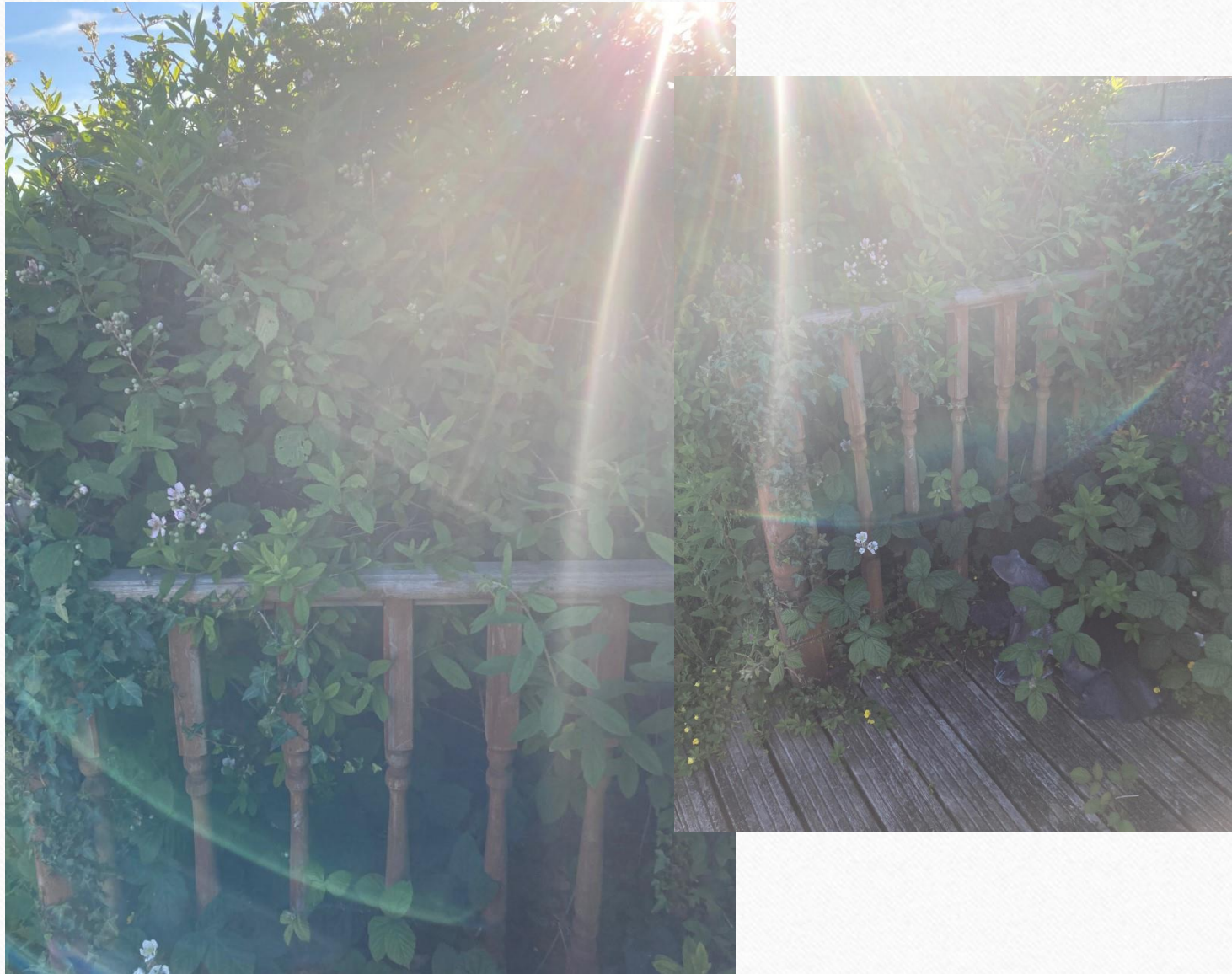
Scientific name: *Rubus fruticosus*

The Bramble is the thorny shrub of hedges, woods and scrub that gives us delicious blackberries in autumn. Gathering wild food can be fun, but it's best to do it with an expert - come along to a Wildlife Trust event to try it.

Grassland

Flower-rich grasslands, once a part of every farm, are part of our culture. Most have developed alongside humans because of livestock grazing and cutting for hay. Many have archaeological and historical features.





Ivy

Scientific name: *Hedera helix*

Ivy is one of our most familiar plants, seen climbing up trees, walls, and along the ground, almost anywhere. It is a great provider of food and shelter for all kinds of animals, from butterflies to bats.



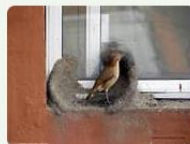
A perfect place for
shelter.





Birds build nests for just one reason - to **hold the birds' eggs** and the **baby birds** after they've hatched.

Bird nests are the **most diverse** and **unique structures** built in all of the animal world.



Most birds build a new nest each year, though some refurbish their old nests. The **large eyries** (or **aeries**) of some eagles are platform nests that have been used and refurbished for several years.

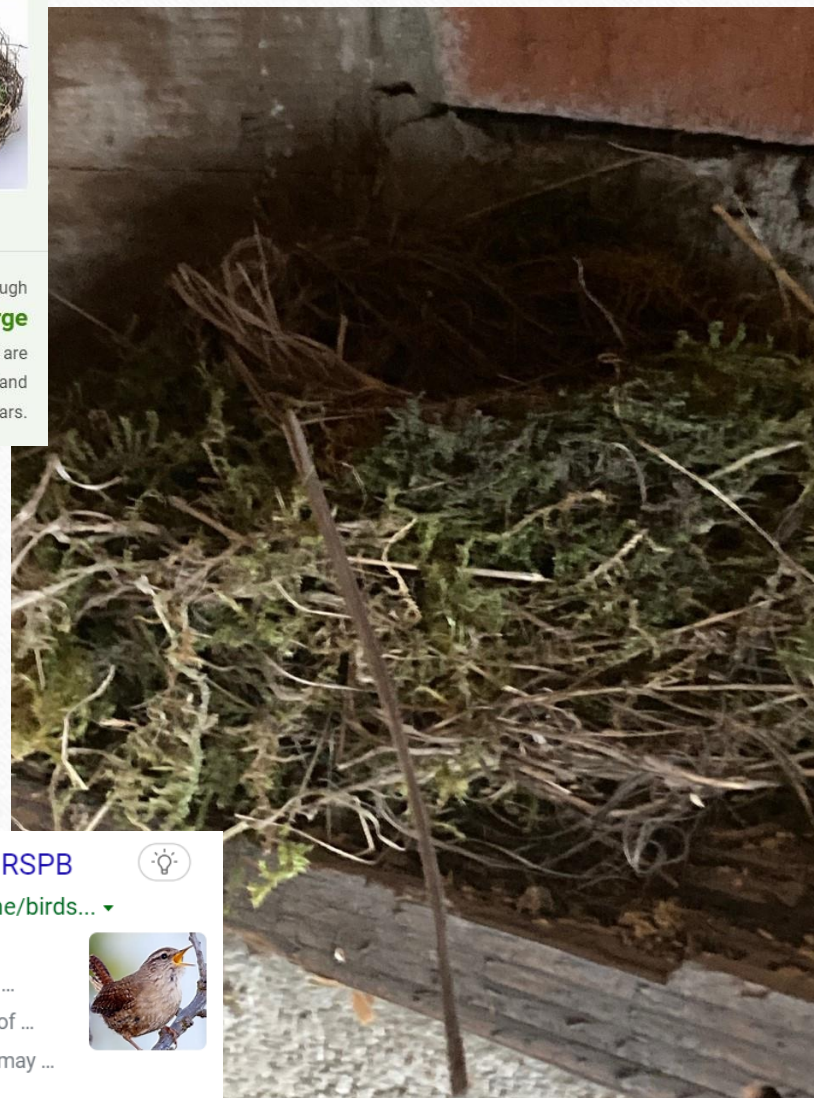
We discovered in the garage two old birds nests!

How do birds make nests | Birds building nests - The RSPB
<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/natures-home-magazine/birds...>

Here are some tips on things you can do to help birds nesting near you:

- Leave out natural fibres and pieces of plant materials for birds to collect. ...
- House sparrows prefer to collect nest material from within a few metres of ...
- Starlings use fresh cut green leaves from spring pruning of shrubs. They may ...

See full list on [rspb.org.uk](https://www.rspb.org.uk)





What is this?

Something has been digging, all
around the garden!



European hedgehog

Scientific name: *Erinaceus europaeus*

Considered a gardener's best friend, hedgehogs will happily Hoover up insects roaming in vegetable beds. Famously covered in spines, hedgehogs like to eat all sorts of bugs and crunchy beetles. They are most active at night and hibernate through winter.



We were very excited to discover that there are hedgehog holes in and around the decking and fence areas. As a child we would regularly see hedgehogs in the garden but this is the first time in many years that we have noticed any indicators that they are still surviving in the area.

It seems we have a night time visitor!



Foxes. Foxes produce dog-like droppings that are **usually pointy at one end and full of fur, feathers, tiny bones, seeds and berries**. In rural areas, fox poo is quite dark, but in urban areas, where foxes eat human food waste, it can be lighter. Fresh droppings have a distinctively musky or 'foxy' smell.

 <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/iden...>

Identify poo | The Wildlife Trusts



Fox Poo

Fox poo is small and dark, almost black and will usually have fur, bone, feathers or berries visible. The smell is musky and appears twisted with one end ending at a point.



For the first time in a very long time I have been able to sit in the garden alone and just look and listened. I have noticed beautiful birdsong and realised that there were lots of birds nesting in the neighbours tree. Our neighbour informed me that he was sure he had seen a fox leaving our garden a few nights before. He joined us in exploring the land and I was amazed by what we discovered. We found that that there were pathways in the long grass created by a large animal. Following the path we discovered large animal droppings which we were able to successfully identify using the Woodland Trust website that they were indeed fox droppings. I learned that foxes like to use their droppings to mark their territory and it appears that the fox is visiting regularly as we notice new paths being made.



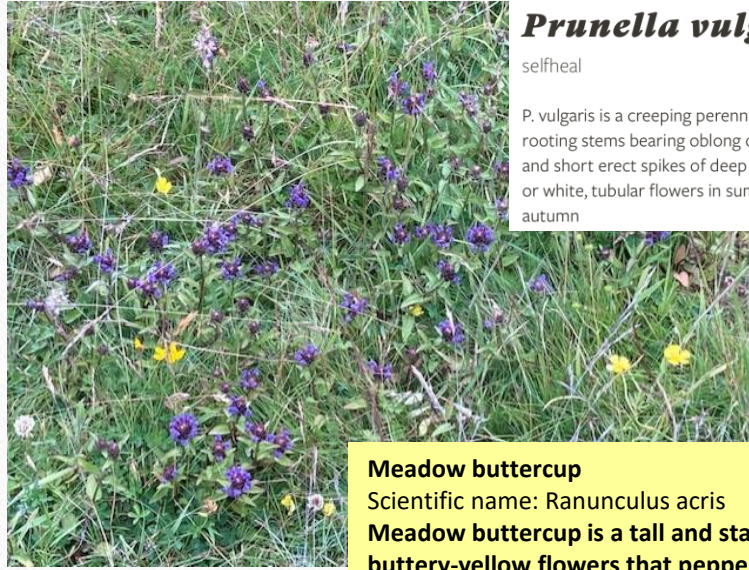
Scarlet Pimpernel – *Anagallis arvensis*

Flowers April-October.
Commonly found in gardens as well as arable fields, dunes, cliffs and heathland. Low growing and sprawling. Flowers are red with a purplish base.



Bramble – *Rubus fruticosus*

Flowers May-October.
Very abundant on waste ground as well as on heaths and in hedgerows and woodland. Thorny shrub with white or pale pink flowers.



Meadow buttercup

Scientific name: *Ranunculus acris*

Meadow buttercup is a tall and stately buttercup, with buttery-yellow flowers that pepper meadows, pastures, gardens and parks with little drops of sunshine.



Prunella vulgaris

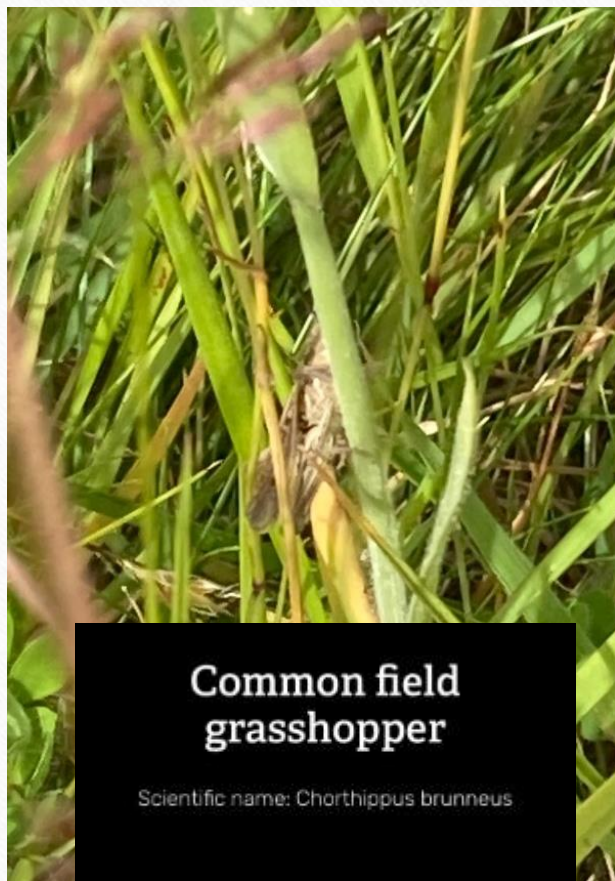
selfheal

P. vulgaris is a creeping perennial to 30cm, with rooting stems bearing oblong or ovate leaves and short erect spikes of deep violet, rarely pink or white, tubular flowers in summer and early autumn



What is creeping thistle?

Creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) is a perennial, found throughout the British Isles and provides a food source for a range of insects and birds. Thistles can be allowed to grow in wilder areas of the garden or in flower meadows for wildlife. Learn more about making the most of lawns as a wildlife habitat and encouraging wildlife in the garden;



Common field grasshopper

Scientific name: *Chorthippus brunneus*

The Common field grasshopper can be found in sunny, grassy areas, particularly gardens, throughout summer. Males can be seen rubbing their legs against their wings to create a 'song' for the females.

Red-headed cardinal beetle

Scientific name: *Pyrochroa serraticornis*

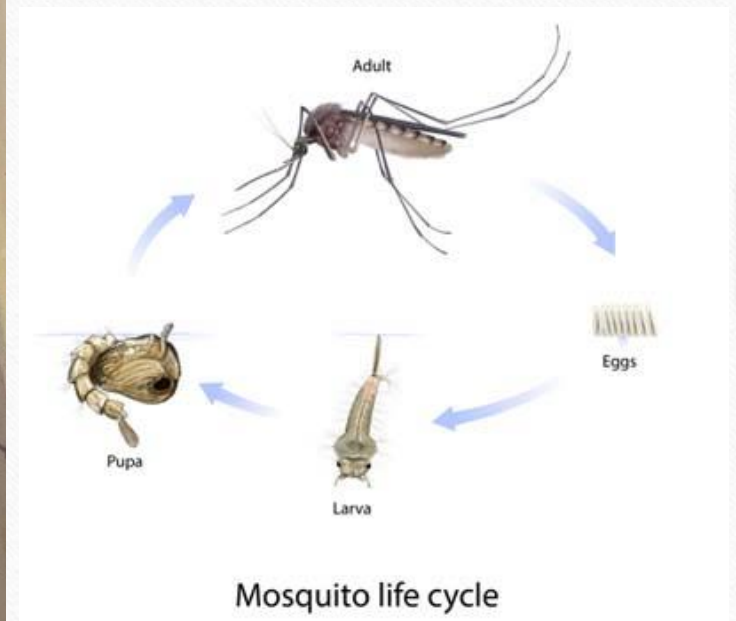
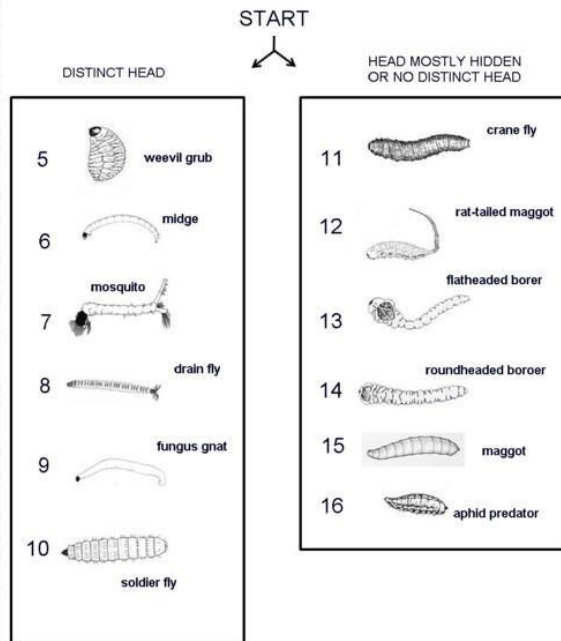
A bright red beetle, with black legs and knobbly antennae, the red-headed cardinal beetle lives up to its name. Look for it in woodland, along hedgerows and in parks and gardens over summer.



[Bumblebee species guide - Bumblebee Conservation Trust](#)

Nature is thriving.

PICTURE KEY TO LARVAL INSECT TYPES: SECTION 2



Over time I have been able to spend time, paying attention to the wide variety of insects in the garden. We have seen grasshoppers, bees, beetles, woodlice and ants. We even discovered in a old plastic box which had filled with rain water some living creatures which we found out were mosquito larvae – until this I had no idea about the life cycle of a mosquito and so learning this with my children has been such a pleasure.

How can we conserve wildlife in our garden?

Clear building materials

Planting

Create a wild meadow area

Hedgehog shelter

Avoid pesticides

Nectar rich plants

Bird box

Flower border

Research wildlife websites

Pollinating plants

Let the grass grow

Keep the hedge



Native plants

Wild flowers

Scrap plans for artificial grass!

Grow climbing plants

Plant a tree

Compost

Bug hotels

Squirrel picnic table

Make a pond

Seeds

Nesting pockets

Bird feeders

Butterfly feeders

Woodpiles

Recycle

Reuse

Get the children involved – a family project!

Conserve...

We decided to concentrate on this area of the garden as we can see patches of the grass has been damaged by our building materials left on top of it.



Our first bug hotel.....



.... and the grasshoppers love it!





Lets get to work!!

We had a very limited budget but we managed to purchase some valuable resources to help with our project. We purchased some compost, wildlife friendly seeds, flowers to plant, a robin nest box, a hedgehog house and another smaller bug hotel. We also started to reuse materials found in the garden to help us create borders, a stand for the bird box and another bug hotel.











To support the natural wildlife we have introduced bug hotels, a hedgehog shelter, a bird box and we have been busy planting pollinating flowers and seeds to attract the bees and butterflies. I have never had an interest in gardening before, so this project has been a huge learning experience for me and one that I wish to continue going forward. My family and I are looking forward to continuously developing and enhancing our garden and we endeavour to support the natural wildlife to thrive. Our next project will be creating a small pond, and a bird bath. We also in future would like to create lots of raised beds with a wide variety of plants and flowers, and we really hope to begin growing our own vegetables too. **The most important decision that the John Muir award has enabled for us is that we are keeping our grass!**

10 days later and the blackberries are almost here!





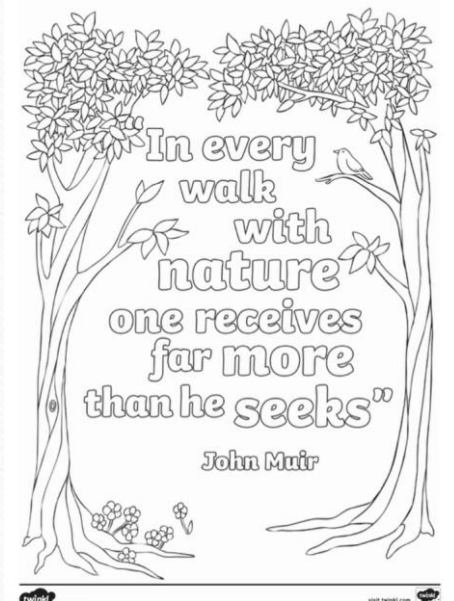
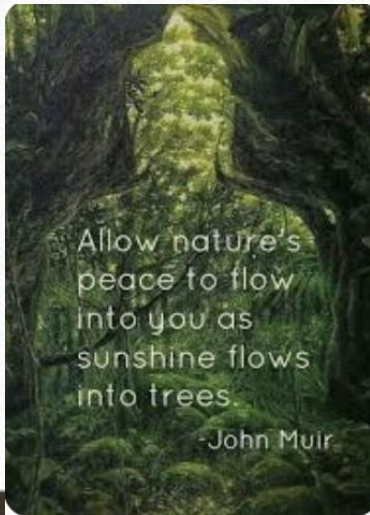
The garden continues to grow wild....





... and new
wildflowers and
plants are
emerging!





I have been sharing my discoveries with my team at my setting and we have decided to do the award with the children to help develop an area in the school grounds or the local community. I am very excited about what we will discover, explore and share with the children in the future.

John Muir famously said that ‘in every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks’, and I believe this to be very true in the learning curve I have experienced in recent weeks.



Our family home, and our beautiful wild garden!