

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

ECEY6005

I have been very fortunate throughout my childhood to have large front and back gardens which my father has always taken pride in maintaining. I have spent my whole life in the valleys surrounded my mountains and forests and my own private little jungle. Being part of the John Muir Award as part of this assignment I have grown to further appreciate the long hours and passion my father puts into our garden, whilst also realising how lucky I am to have been raised in such a luscious environment.

WHAT I DISCOVERED...



My father takes the utmost pride in his lawns, so much so that he even maintains the council grass outside our house and regularly uses "keep off the grass" signs to stop delivery vans from driving onto them, which we regularly mention at the dinner table.



GARDENING THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

This experience also led me to a deeper understanding of my own family's long-standing relationship with gardening. Through conversations with my dad, gran, and grandad, I learned how gardening had always been an integral part of our lives, passed down through generations. My gran and grandad always had a lush, thriving garden, overflowing with colourful flowers, buzzing insects, and singing birds. It was their pride and joy, and they would spend countless hours there, planting, pruning, observing the garden they had been creating since they moved back to Maesteg from Kent in the 60's. When I was younger, I spent much of my time in their garden too. It was where I played, explored, and began to fall in love with the natural world. Whenever we weren't in the garden we were exploring local botanical gardens.



Even after both my grandparents had passed away my father continued to prune and dead head the flowers everyday for nearly 2 years until the house was sold, as gardening was such a significant part of his childhood and adult life.

One of the most magical features of their garden was the garage wall, which was covered in thick clematis and lined with wooden birdhouses that my grandfather had built many years ago. My nan would watch daily as familiar birds and even squirrels returned to the boxes, recognising certain individuals and naming them based on their behaviours or appearance. I specifically remember a red squirrel she named Cyril who would visit the windowsill daily. She kept a notebook where she recorded the different bird species that landed on her feeder, noting patterns across the seasons. This quiet, dedicated practice of observation left a deep impression on me. It taught me the value of paying attention to the simple things in life.



MY GARDEN THROUGH THE YEARS

We now have a patio as we had to deconstruct the decking to make way for another extension we had recently. The remnants of the nearly 20 year old decking is still on show in the window of my fathers shed, as he is quite sentimental about "good pieces of wood".



2003

The most significant change has been the removal of the pond, which housed frogs and goldfish to accommodate the extension. My parents also said it was necessary as I was prone taking off the fencing and jumping in when I was a toddler.



This shrub is older than me, bought by my mother as a gift to my father when she moved into the house in 2002, it still stands to this day and his home to some hedgehogs during the year, which my father feeds, waters, and cares for as if they are his own.

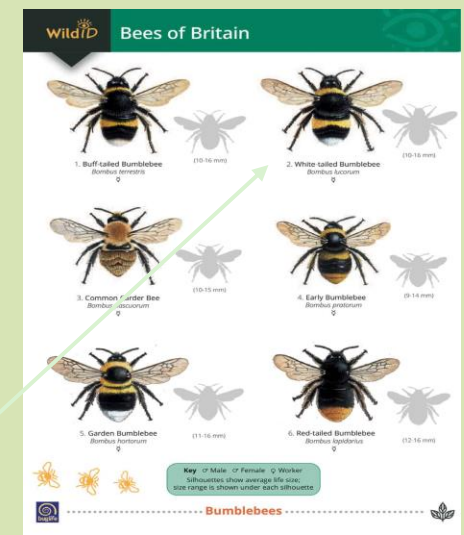
Our dog Ruby is also very fond of the garden but regularly gets frightened by bees and butterflies that land on her.

Present day

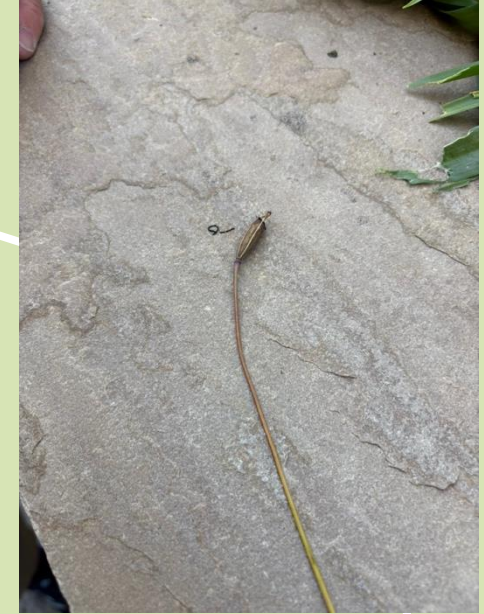


EXPLORE

As I documented plant species, I also began observing the bees that frequently visited. I learned about some of the bee species common in South Wales, such as the red-tailed bumblebee, the early bumblebee, and the white-tailed bumblebee. This awareness of pollinators encouraged me to pay closer attention to their foraging habits, the plants they preferred, and the times of day they were most active, highlighting their essential role in sustaining local ecosystems. Below are screenshots from a video I took of a white-tailed bumblebee collecting and spreading pollen on daylilies.



THE LIFE CYCLE OF A WELSH POPPY



I spent time identifying the many species of plants and trees growing in my garden, many of which were self-seeding. This sparked my interest in how unmanaged spaces, often viewed as messy or unkempt, are essential for ecological diversity.

CONSERVING AS PART OF THE JOHN MUIR AWARD

As part of the conservation element of the award, I worked with my dad to build a hedgehog den and a bug hotel. This hands-on activity was especially meaningful. Most importantly, it helped me see how environmental education can be rooted in everyday spaces and family traditions. My garden became not just a site of learning, but a living archive of memory, values, and evolving sustainability practices. Working alongside my dad and hearing stories from my grandparents gave me a renewed appreciation for how deeply personal our relationship with nature can be, and how these experiences can shape our attitudes toward conservation and care.

Cosy hedgehog den located under the hedges that have been planted along the old Madog Farm wall



Luxury 5* bug hotel located behind the shed against the old Madog Farm wall.

Ultimately, the John Muir Award challenged me to look differently at the space I inhabit and inspired me to take responsibility for its care. It deepened my ecological awareness, strengthened my family bonds, and reaffirmed the value of hands on learning. Going forward, I am motivated to continue these practices and to seek ways to share this knowledge with others, particularly younger children so that they too can form meaningful relationships with nature.



Sir David Attenborough is one of the most respected and influential naturalists and broadcasters in the world. Born in London in 1926, he has spent over seven decades dedicated to exploring and documenting the wonders of the natural world. His career began at the BBC in the early 1950s, and he quickly rose to fame as a presenter and producer. Attenborough's gift for storytelling, combined with his deep scientific knowledge and iconic narration, helped transform nature programming into an art form.

Attenborough is perhaps best known for his groundbreaking series of nature documentaries, particularly the Life series, which includes Life on Earth (1979), The Living Planet (1984), and The Life of Birds (1998), among many others. More recently, his collaborations with the BBC and Netflix, such as Planet Earth, Blue Planet II, and Our Planet, have reached massive international audiences and brought urgent attention to environmental issues.

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

Through his lifelong work, Attenborough has not only educated millions but also inspired generations to care about and protect the natural world. His legacy is not only in the documentaries he helped create but also in the global awareness he has fostered about the beauty of life on Earth.

As a conservationist, David Attenborough has used his global platform to advocate for the protection of biodiversity and the urgent need to address climate change. In his later years, he has become increasingly vocal about the impact of human activity on the planet, warning of deforestation, species extinction, and the climate crisis. His 2020 film A Life on Our Planet serves as both a personal witness statement and a rallying cry for environmental action, urging viewers to take responsibility for the Earth's future.

