

Exploring My Garden

Regaining Paradise: Sustainability in the Early Years

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The John Muir Award

John Muir is a Scottish born naturalist who is widely recognised as one of the worlds most influential conservationists due to his passion for protecting the natural environment. John Muir believed that spending time in nature was essential for both human wellbeing and the protection of wildlife. John Muir was passionate about protecting wild places from development and believed that everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy them. His campaigning played an important role in the conservation movement in the United States and helped influence the protection of several important natural areas, including Yosemite National Park.

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme that encourages people of all ages to connect with, enjoy, and care for nature. It is designed to inspire participants to discover the natural world, explore it through meaningful experiences, take practical action to conserve it, and share what they have learned with others. The award is inclusive and accessible, recognising that valuable natural experiences can take place in a wide range of environments from gardens and school grounds to woodlands, beaches, parks, and national parks. The focus is not on completing difficult challenges, but on developing a lasting relationship with nature through personal experience.

The John Muir Award is organised by the John Muir Trust, a conservation charity established to protect and restore wild places while encouraging people to experience and value the natural environment. The award was created to continue John Muir's legacy by inspiring individuals and communities to care for nature and recognise the importance of conservation. The award is based around four simple challenges:

- **Discover** – Spend time getting to know a natural place.
- **Explore** – Learn more about nature through observation and activities.
- **Conserve** – Take practical action to care for and improve the environment.
- **Share** – Tell others about your experiences and what you have learned.

These four challenges encourage participants to build a deeper connection with nature while developing a sense of responsibility for protecting it for future generations.



For my John Muir Award, I chose to explore my own garden as my natural environment. Although it is a familiar place that I see every day, I wanted to discover it from a different perspective by taking the time to observe the wildlife, plants, insects, and seasonal changes that are often overlooked. Exploring my own garden also allowed me to visit the same location regularly, observe changes over time, and develop a greater appreciation for the biodiversity that exists close to home. The garden has been part of my home for 25 years and has changed over time. It has been maintained through regular gardening, with different flowers, shrubs, and other plants added over the years. As the vegetation has become more established, the garden has attracted a range of wildlife, including birds, insects, and small animals. While it is a managed environment, it continues to provide valuable habitats and food sources for local wildlife.

The garden is approximately 10 metres by 8 metres and consists of a lawn, flower beds, shrubs, potted plants, a patio, vegetable patch and an outdoor seating area. My garden receives full sun and shade throughout the day and changes noticeably with the seasons. During spring and summer, many flowers bloom and insects become more active, while autumn and winter bring changes in leaf colour, bird activity, and plant growth. These seasonal changes make it an ideal location for ongoing observation and exploration.#

I hope that by observing my garden more closely, I will develop a greater understanding of the wildlife it supports, recognise the importance of small green spaces for biodiversity, and build a stronger connection with the natural environment.



The purpose of this section was to explore my garden in more detail and gain a better understanding of the plants, wildlife, and natural processes that occur within it. Throughout this project, I visited my garden regularly to observe changes, identify different species, and record my findings through photographs and written notes.

Observing and identifying birds, insects, and other wildlife at different times of the day.



Bumblebee
pollinating the
Lavender plant



Bumblebee
pollinating the
Clematis 'Piilu'

I used the google app on my phone to
see which butterfly this was



- This insect is likely a **Meadow Brown butterfly** (*Maniola jurtina*), which is one of the most common grassland butterflies in the UK.
- It typically has brown wings, sometimes with orange patches, and a prominent black eyespot with a white pupil on its forewing.
- These butterflies are active from June through September and are known to fly even in dull weather.
- They are often found in wildflower meadows, grasslands, and parks.

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Identifying plants, flowers, trees, and shrubs



This is a Crocosmia,
also known as a
Montbretia



At the top of this picture is a
Hydrangea macrophylla.
These require consistent
moisture.
Underneath are potted red
Petunias and blue Pansies.



On the left of this picture is a
Eucalyptus tree. These
require full sun and good
drainage. Next to it is a
Rhododendron, which
thrives well in well-watered
soil and dappled sun.

Signs of animal activity, such as nests, webs, feathers, or footprints.

Whilst observing the wildlife in my garden, I noticed that there were black birds, nuthatches, thrushs, blue tits, house sparrows, wood pigeons and occasionally coal tits that were visiting my garden.



When exploring my garden, I noticed a few spider webs surrounding my garden shed.

The birds that I spotted, were mostly hiding in the hedge close to the holly tree.



Different areas of the garden attracting the most wildlife.



Where the bigger bushes and shrubs were, I noticed lots of insects surrounding these areas.

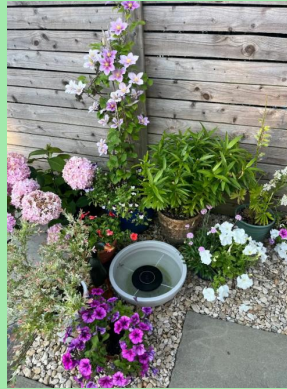


When looking close into the soil that was below these plants, I found flies, snails, slugs and worms.

I have made several changes to improve the garden for wildlife and increase its environmental value.



A shallow water source for birds and insects.



Bird feeders that are regularly topped up.



Grown mint in the garden to use instead of buying it.



Leaving small piles of branches and wood to create natural habitats.



Maintained areas of longer grass to provide shelter for insects.

conserve



I attached a bird box to the side of the garden shed, offering a safe space to the birds.

Also, as part of the conserve section, I created an area for a compost bin. Here I would add waste vegetables and fruit, eggshells and other natural foods. This area has become a perfect home for worms and insects.



Watering plants responsibly during dry periods.

In a recent heat wave, the Hydrangea plant noticeably drooped down due to the heat. I had to water this 2-3 times a day as these plants need lots of water to help them grow.



The John Muir Award has taught me the importance of taking time to observe nature, understanding how ecosystems work, and recognising that everyone has a role to play in protecting the environment. I have learned that conservation does not always require large projects; even small actions can make a meaningful contribution to biodiversity. I am proud of the work that I have done in my own garden, it has become a much more environmentally friendly place.

Following this, I have taken the opportunity to speak to my family and colleagues in work about the importance of our outdoor green spaces. I have showed them the photographs of my progress whilst completing this award, I have also explained the different activities I carried out and the importance of each activity.

The knowledge I have gained whilst completing this award can now be applied when I am visiting other green spaces such as local parks like Clyne Gardens and Singleton Park.

