

The background of the entire image is a dense, close-up photograph of dark green leaves. The leaves have prominent veins and are layered, creating a textured, organic feel. The lighting is soft, highlighting the natural patterns of the foliage.

IN THE GARDEN

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Introduction |

Every day, I listened to the birds chirping in my garden, yet I had never truly considered their individuality. However, through working on this assignment and paying closer attention to the birds that visited, I quickly realised the surprising variety of species that appeared—though crows seemed to be the most frequent guests! As I took on the John Muir Award, I came to the realisation that my back garden was not a safe space for birds, nor did it support insects or provide suitable habitats for local wildlife. This prompted me to reconnect with nature and transform the garden into a haven where birds and insects could find shelter and nutritious food. Alongside this, I began growing crops to support my family, neighbours, and friends—creating a space that benefits both people and the planet.





Discover

Growing up, I was always an outdoorsy child—spending endless hours with friends in the garden and nearby forests, building dens, playing hide and seek and discovering the wonders of nature. I was raised in the Valleys, surrounded by mountains, grassy areas and stretches of abandoned land that became our playground. We spent hours crafting bird feeders out of sticks, birdhouses with branches and bug hotels, finding joy in creating small habitats for wildlife. However, after the age of sixteen, this became a distant memory as family, college and day-to-day life became a priority.

Taking on the John Muir Award has given me the chance to reconnect with my childhood curiosity and love for nature, wildlife, and different species. It has encouraged me to explore my own back garden in a more thoughtful and intentional way, sparking ideas for how to improve the space—both as a place for my family to enjoy and as a welcoming habitat for birds, insects, and other wildlife. Emotionally, this experience has been uplifting as it has brought a sense of calm, wonder and connection to the world around me.



Discover

Before beginning my John Muir Award journey, my garden lacked life, wildlife diversity, and character. There were no plants to attract or support insects, and the space felt empty and uninspiring!



Explore

This prompted me to research ways to create a more wildlife-friendly space to introduce plants that rich in pollen for bees, and adding birdhouses and feeders to encourage nesting and nourishment.

Transforming my garden into a shared living space for both humans and nature feels like an exciting project, requiring new soil, flowering plants, home grown vegetables and handmade habitats to truly bring the garden to life.

Whilst exploring my back garden, I noticed how safe, secure and tidy the area was for my family, pets and children. However, I also realised that the pebbles and stones left little opportunity for plants and wildlife to thrive, nest or find a safe habitat. There were no plants to support bees, and no birdhouses or feeders to help local birds and wildlife to flourish.



Explore

Birdhouses



Spot the
Woodlouse!



Explore

Did you find it?

Spot the
Woodlouse!



Conserve

During my research, I planned and introduced a variety of changes to encourage, support and engage with wildlife. I used offcuts of wood to build a birdhouse, made homemade bird feed with the children in my setting, and bought soil, flowers and seeds to grow a mix of flowering plants and vegetables. These efforts helped my family and I to reconnect with nature and support local biodiversity more effectively. My family, neighbours and children adored being part of the Award and began to enjoy nature and the outdoors, just as much as I do!

By taking part in the John Muir Award, I discovered that telling myself I was “too busy” to spend time in the garden—planting flowers and vegetables or building habitats for wildlife—was not truly the case. Through this realisation, I invited my family to get involved and even created an activity within my Early Years setting to help nurture nature in our own back garden. During this time, my family became deeply involved in supporting the changes I made—planting seeds, choosing flowers, and helping me design nature-based activities for the children at work.



Conserve

Did you know?

While birds are not attracted to a single specific colour, certain colours can be more appealing than others. Green offers a sense of camouflage, making birds feel safer and more likely to approach a birdhouse. Red and yellow are also colours that birds tend to recognise, as their brightness makes feeders or houses more visible. Red, in particular, is often associated with flowers and fruits, which some birds instinctively recognise as food sources.



Red to resemble
flowers and
fruits!

Yellow to ensure
visibility is
guaranteed!



Green for safety!

Conserve

I placed the birdhouse in this area as I had observed it to be popular with smaller birds. This area is enclosed and shaded, which seemed to provide them with a sense of safety and comfort.



Conserve

Throughout my research on flowers, it became evident that flower colour plays a significant role in the natural world. Wildlife often use plants for camouflage, communication, and as a means of deterring other species.

Additionally, flower pigmentation can help protect animals from excessive sunlight and assist with regulating body temperature.

Flowers and plants are also vital to wildlife, providing nectar for pollinators such as bees and serving as an important food source for birds during the winter months.



Conserve

After completing my planting and experimenting with different creative ideas, I went on to build birdhouses, install bird feeders, and grow a variety of flowers, fruits, and vegetables. These efforts will not only support local wildlife but also benefit my family and friends by providing fresh produce and a more engaging outdoor space. Now I am able to sit in my garden and admire the dedication and hard work I have invested to support local insects. I can listen to the birds chirping as they enjoy their nutritious food, while butterflies flutter gracefully in the breeze.



Birds Noticed in my Garden

These are examples of the nine bird species I observed in my back garden, which became regular visitors to the area. Unfortunately, photographing them proved difficult, as they often flew off quickly or moved away while feeding. I tried various techniques to capture a good image—whether by staying quiet, remaining indoors, or positioning myself several metres away. Despite my efforts, the birds seemed highly alert and always aware of my presence, no matter how subtle I tried to be.



Pigeon

Photo of Pigeon by
unknown photographer



Seagull

Photo of Seagull by
unknown photographer



Crow

Photo of Crow by
unknown photographer



Magpie

Photo of Magpie by
unknown photographer

Robin

Photo of Robin by
unknown photographer



Blue Tit

Photo of Blue Tit by
unknown photographer



Birds noticed in my garden



Chaffinch

Photo of Chaffinch by
unknown photographer



House Sparrow

Photo of House Sparrow by
unknown photographer



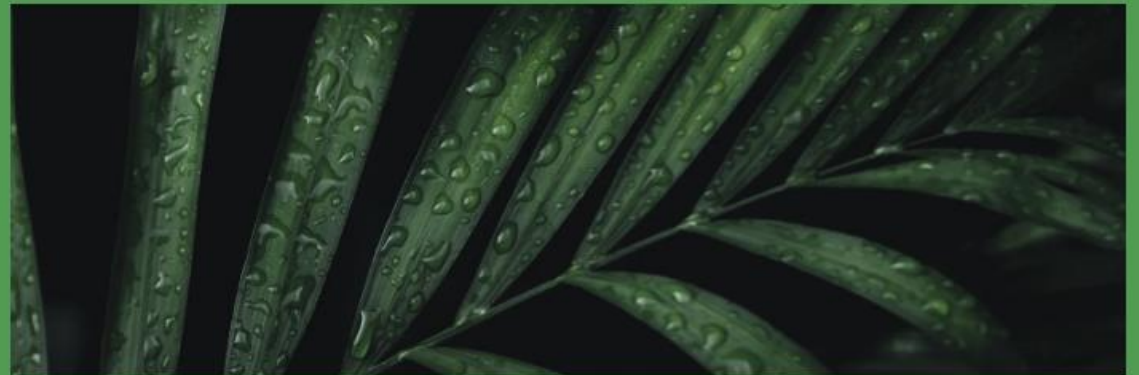
Common Blackbird

Information on a Common
Blackbird - photographer: Katie
Cornelius-Davies

Observations

During my observations of the birds in my garden, I quickly identified the areas they preferred to use. They often landed on the back wall, the side wall, and the newly designed bird feeder. I have learned that birds are constantly seeking shelter from rain and unfamiliar noises. However, my garden initially lacked sheltered spaces, which led me to build birdhouses to offer a safe, welcoming home for them.

Through my research, I also discovered that bird populations tend to decrease in summer. This is likely because birds are able to find more ample food sources in the countryside. In contrast, during winter, they are more likely to return to garden spaces like mine, where they benefit from extra shelter and the food I provide.



Planting

During my John Muir Award experience, I was able to reduce personal expenses by growing my own fruit and vegetables. By planting seeds and growing produce such as strawberries, potatoes, tomatoes, courgettes, spring onions, and more in my garden, I provided a sustainable food source for my family. This initiative significantly eased financial pressures within my household and allowed me to contribute meaningfully to our well-being.

As part of my planting experience, I also began providing fruit and vegetables to my elderly neighbours, many of whom find it both financially and physically challenging to visit supermarkets on a weekly basis. This small act of sharing not only strengthened my relationships with the community but also supported those in need with fresh, homegrown produce.



Plants and Flowers Planted in my Garden



Courgette



Tomatoes



Strawberries



Potatoes



Spring Onions



Melon



Marigold, pansy,
carnations, lobelia flowers
in each basket

Insects in my Garden

These are some of the wildlife species I regularly observed in my back garden, as they became frequent visitors to the area. Unfortunately, photographing them proved challenging, as they often flew away or moved off quickly upon detecting my presence. I experimented with different techniques to capture a good image—such as staying quiet, remaining indoors, or positioning myself several metres away. Despite these efforts, the wildlife remained highly alert and seemed aware of my presence no matter how discreet I tried to be.



Lady Bug

Photo of Lady Bug by
unknown photographer



Butterfly

Photo of Butterfly by
unknown photographer



Bumble Bee

Photo of Bumble Bee by
unknown photographer



Wasp

Photo of Wasp by
unknown photographer

Snail

Photo of Snail by
unknown photographer



House Fly

Photo of House Fly by
unknown photographer

Reflection

Throughout my recent experience completing the John Muir Award, I have come to appreciate how truly precious my time in the garden is. The sound of birds chirping and the sight of insects feeding on the plants I have nurtured have given me a quiet sense of joy. Watching my own crops flourish under my care has been one of the most rewarding parts of this journey. Spending time outdoors has not only allowed me to connect with nature on a deeper level, but it has also encouraged self-sufficiency and resilience. By growing my own food, I have been able to support my family during financially challenging times and even share fresh produce with elderly neighbours who struggle to access supermarkets. This sense of purpose, community, and environmental stewardship has helped shape my understanding of sustainability in a very personal way. I am looking forward to continuing this journey within nature itself.



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The background of the slide is a dense, top-down view of green foliage, likely a plant with palmately compound leaves, creating a textured and naturalistic pattern.

Thank You

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