



Sustainability in the Early Years

The Gnoll Country Park

Discover Gnoll Country Park



Why this place matters to me

The Gnoll Country Park holds strong personal significance for me, as it has been a part of my life from a young age.

I visited regularly while growing up, spending time feeding the ducks, playing in the parks, climbing trees, and enjoying picnics in the open fields with my family.

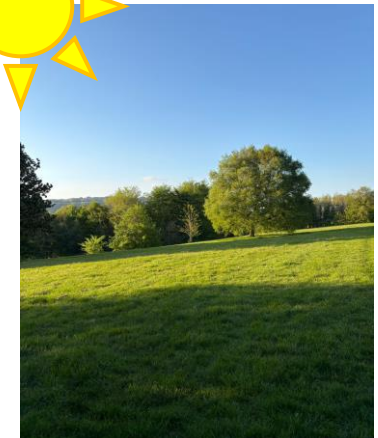
These experiences have helped to build a deep sense of familiarity and connection. I still visit often for walks, which allow me to relax and reconnect with the natural environment. As a result, the park is not just a local green space, but a place filled with lasting memories and personal meaning.



A Place with History

The Gnoll Country Park is a historically significant site that was once a grand estate dating back to at least the 16th century.

- Its former house, Gnoll House, was demolished in 1957.
- It features elements of its 18th-century landscaped design, including cascades, ponds, and gardens.
- The park spans over 200 acres and is home to a wide variety of wildlife such as ducks, swans, herons, and red kites.
- It also includes unique features like the well-known Hollow Tree, which has been enjoyed by generations.
- Recent developments have helped to restore and improve the park for visitors, while preserving its natural beauty and rich history.



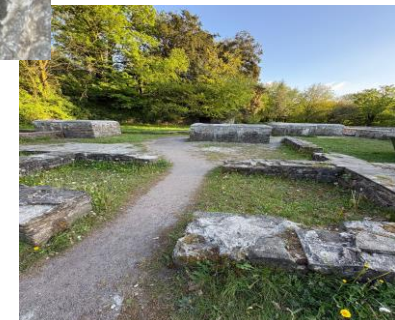
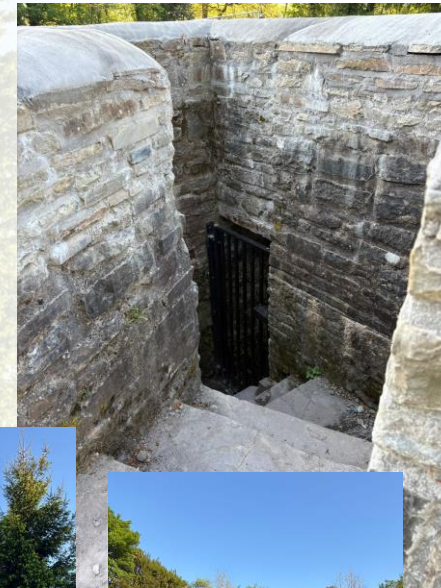
I chose The Gnull Country Park as the focus for my John Muir project because it provides a rich, natural environment where young children can safely experience and connect with nature.

The park offers a variety of habitats, including woodland, open grass areas, and water features, which support hands-on learning and curiosity. This makes it an ideal setting to support the Discover, Explore and Conserve elements of the John Muir Award.

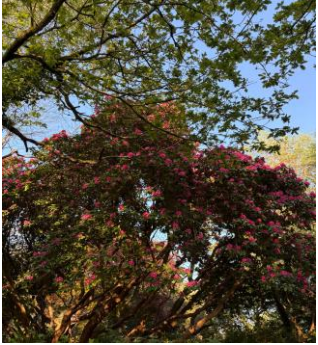
Its accessibility and well-maintained paths allow children of all abilities to engage with the outdoors, while the changing seasons provide opportunities to observe and reflect on how the environment evolves over time.

The park's natural beauty encourages a sense of wonder and respect for the environment, and features such as the old estate ruins help children begin to understand the relationship between people and the natural landscape.

By using this local green space, children are also able to build a meaningful connection with a place they can revisit, helping to foster long-term awareness of sustainability and the importance of caring for their environment.



Explore



Pontic Rhododendron



The flowers have a slightly sweet scent that attracts pollinators like bees.

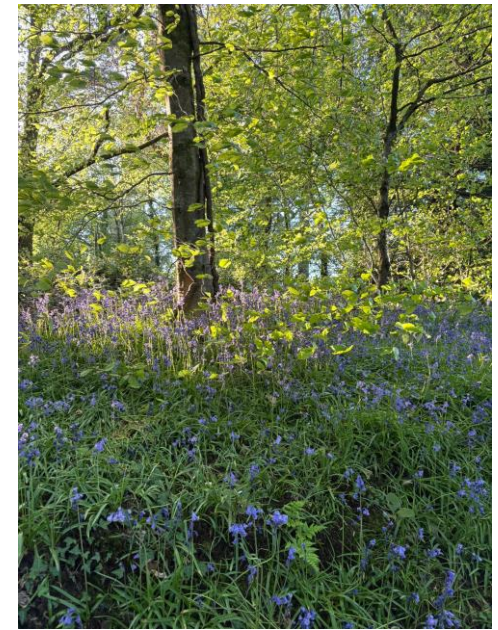


Flowers

Bluebells thrive in ancient woodlands, where they take advantage of sunlight before the tree canopy fully closes for summer. Because of this, a well-established bluebell woodland is often a sign of a very old, undisturbed ecosystem.



Bluebell



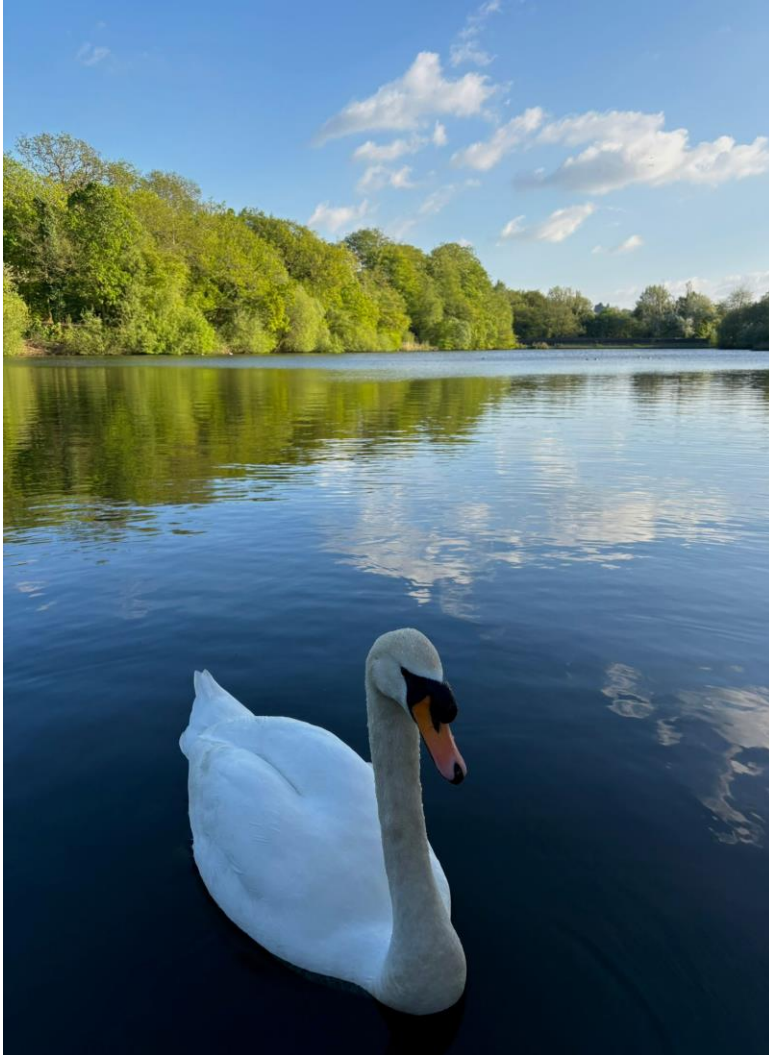
The flowers come first, usually in spring: simple, white blooms with five petals and a yellow center. These are followed by the red fruits in early summer.

Woodland Strawberry



Explore

Mute Swan 🦢



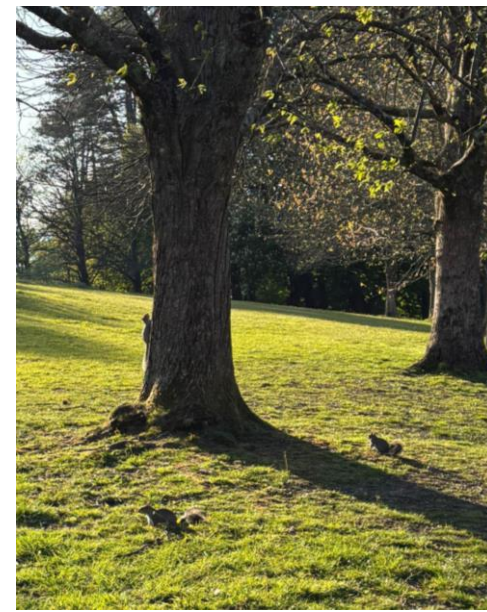
Animals

Mute swans feed mainly on aquatic plants, which they reach by dipping their long necks underwater.



Eastern Gray Squirrel

They're highly resourceful feeders. Their diet includes nuts, seeds, fruits, fungi, and sometimes bird eggs or young birds, though plant material makes up most of what they eat.



Eurasian Magpie



Magpies are very adaptable and thrive in a wide range of environments—from farmland and woodland edges to towns and gardens.

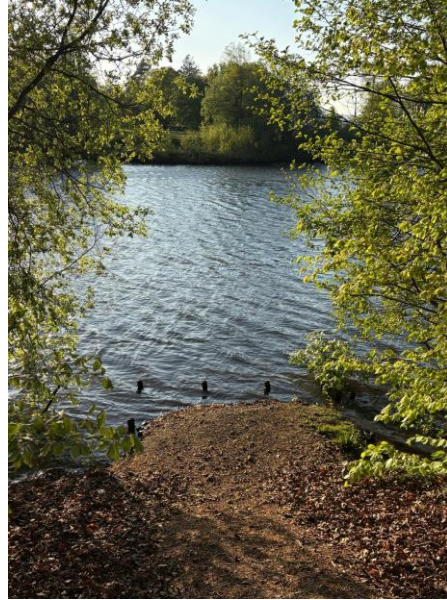


Flooding and Water Management

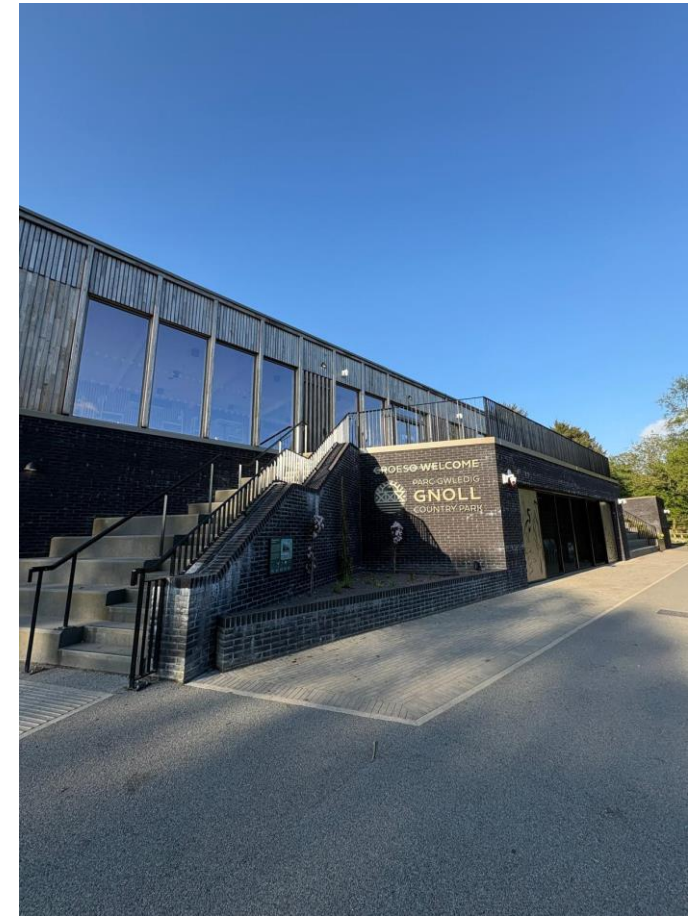
The Gnoll Country Park has experienced flooding in the past, particularly in November 2022 when a culvert collapsed, causing damage to nearby homes and businesses. In response, Neath Port Talbot Council has introduced a natural flood management scheme, including woodland planting and restoration work, to help reduce flood risk and protect the local community.



Flooding can damage habitats and wash away soil.



The park has streams and lakes that can flood during heavy rainfall. Climate change is making heavy rainfall more common.



Human Impact and Development

The park has recently had a £12 million redevelopment with new buildings, paths and play areas. Although this redevelopment has brought in more visitors to the park, it also means an increase of litter, damage to plants and disturbance to wildlife.

🥵 Problems?

Plastic takes anywhere from 20 to 500 years to decompose. As plastics degrade, they fragment into microplastics which accumulate in ecosystems and enter the food chain, posing long-term environmental and health risks.

Litter contaminates soil, water and air, affecting plant growth, water quality, and animals.

Conserve

 Look after wildlife and Habitats



 Reduce Litter and Waste



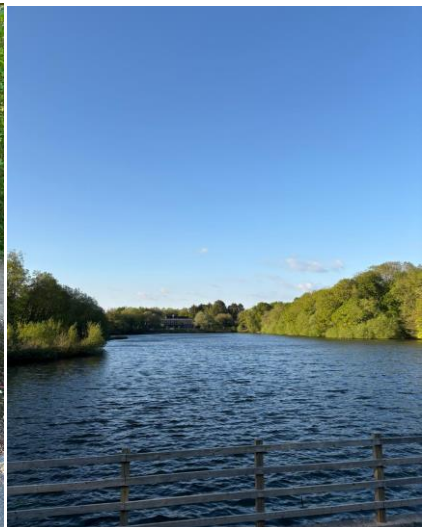
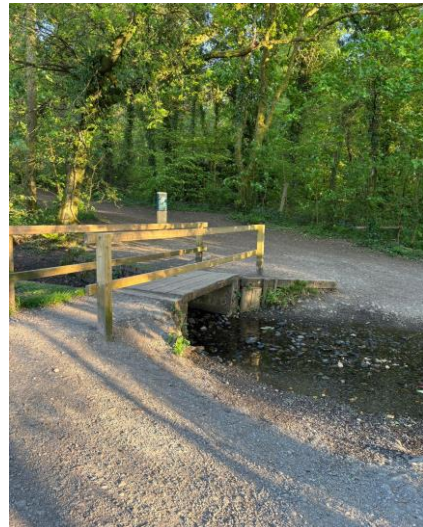
 Be a Responsible Visitor

 Protect Trees and Plant Life

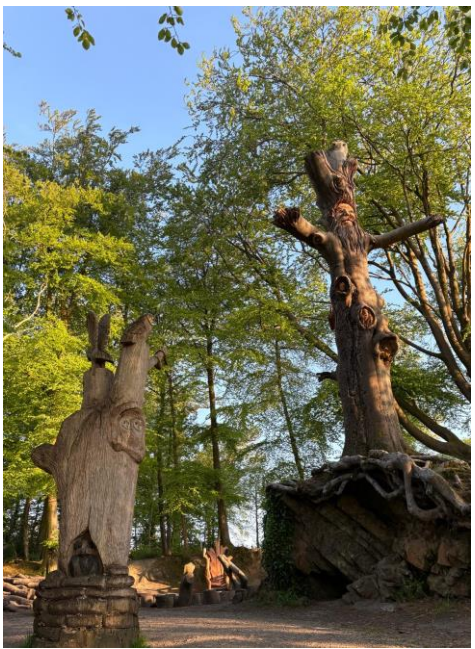


Conserve

 Care for water areas



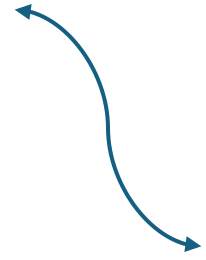
 Encourage Sustainable Habits
Beyond the Park



 Get involved in conservation activities



 Share and Educate



» Caring for nature



Report Damage and Issues to Local Community.

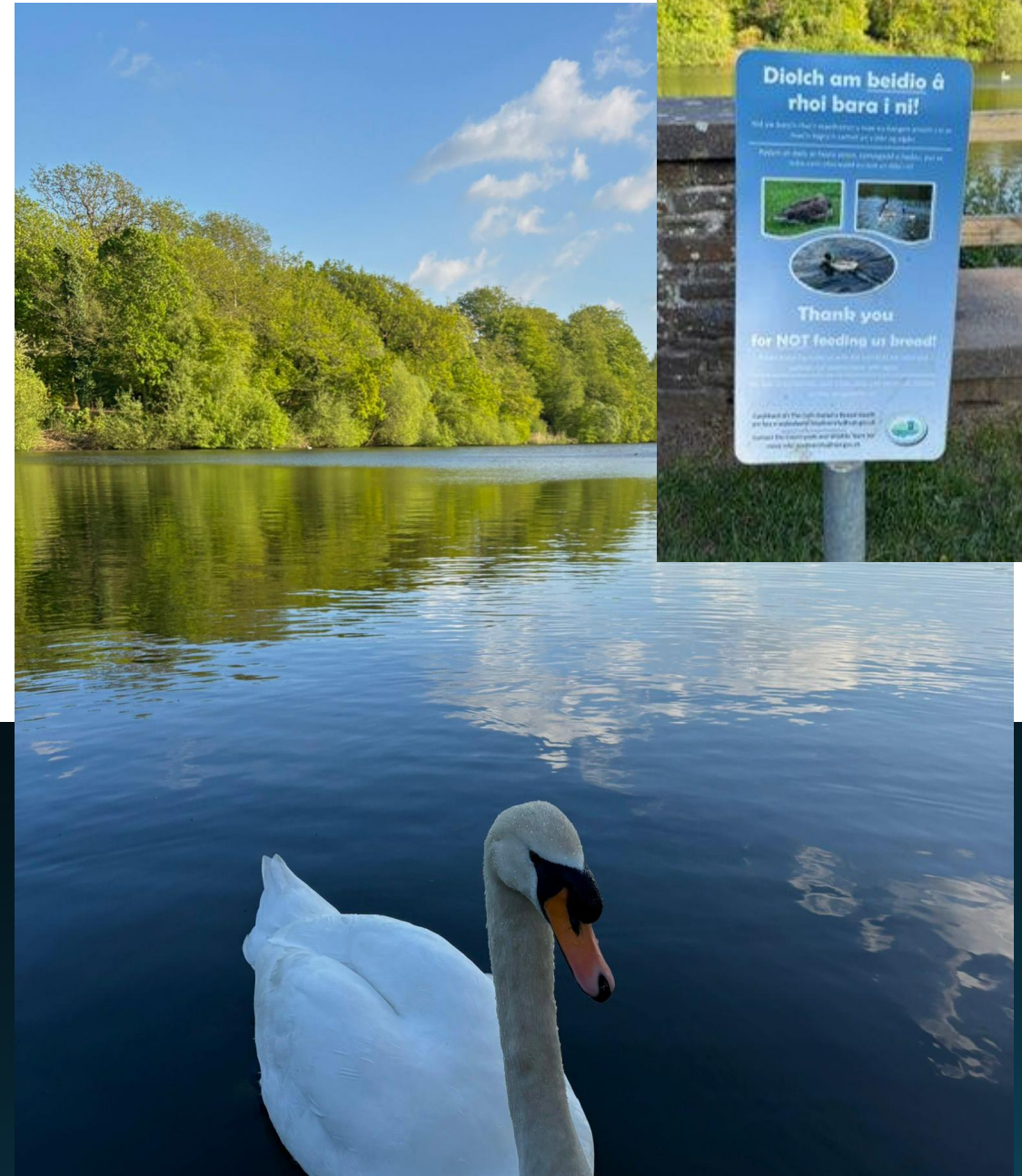
The Mute Swan

They are called “mute” because they are quieter than other swan species, although they can still hiss or grunt—especially if they feel threatened.

They live on lakes, ponds, and slow-moving rivers, where they feed mainly on aquatic plants. You will often see them dipping their long necks underwater to reach food. Due to this, they play an important role in keeping water ecosystems balanced.

Mute swans usually mate for life and build large nests close to the water’s edge. The female lays eggs which hatch into fluffy grey chicks called cygnets. Both parents are very protective, so it is important for people to keep a safe distance.

To CONSERVE the Mute Swan in the Gnoll Country Park, it is important to keep their habitat clean and safe. This includes not dropping litter, avoid feeding them harmful foods like bread, and allowing them space, especially during nesting season. By looking after the environment and respecting wildlife, we can help protect mute swans for the future.





At the Gnoll Country Park, we laugh and
play,

Among the trees where shadows sway.

We listen close to birds that sing,

And watch the busy insects bring.

The leaves crunch softly beneath our
feet,

The air is fresh, the world feels sweet.

We see the streams that dance and flow,

And learn how nature helps things grow.

We pick up litter, do our part,
With helping hands and caring hearts.

We know this park is not just ours,
It is home to bugs and trees and flowers.

We walk with care, we take our time,
To keep this place a space that shines.

For every child who comes to see,
The beauty of our world so free.

So, we will help, protect, conserve,
Because it is what all nature deserves.

And as we learn, we understand—
The future can be safe in every hand.