

Regaining
Paradise:



Sustainability
in the Early Years

ECEY6005

Barbara Sliwinska

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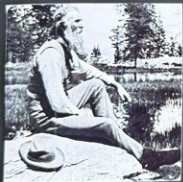
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John Muir Awards

John Muir was a Scottish-born conservationist, writer, explorer, and a keen champion of nature.

He was drawn to pristine, untouched wilderness.



He favoured environments that were wild and ecologically diverse.

He explored them, wrote about them, and worked to protect them.

John Muir personally believed that nature should be for, because it is valuable, but also it helps people and wildlife thrive.

He inspired the creation of the world's first national park system.

Why John Muir?

- He understood nature as a whole.

Muir carefully studied how plants, animals, and the environment all work together.

- He believed nature has its own value.

He thought wild places should be protected, not just used for human benefit. He believed people are part of nature, not in control of it.

- He believed nature helps people.

Muir felt that spending time outdoors improves.



our mental and physical well-being. Through his writing, he encouraged others to enjoy and care for nature.

- He worked to protect places.

Muir campaigned against harmful development and helped inspire the creation of national parks, including Yosemite National Park.

Inspired by John Muir, I created this album to share the beauty of my local Porthkerry Park. I hope it inspires others to visit, explore, and enjoy the amazing natural surroundings this special place has to offer.

J O H N

M U I R

DISCOVER
CONSERVE
EXPLORE
SHARE

Discover

Porthkerry Country Park

Porthkerry Country Park is a large country park near Barry in South Wales. It covers about 220 acres of woodland, meadows, streams, and a pebble beach. The park is also known for its



large Victorian railway viaduct.

The land has been used as farmland, woodland and meadows since medieval times. In 1412, the land was bought by the Romily family, who created a model farm using modern

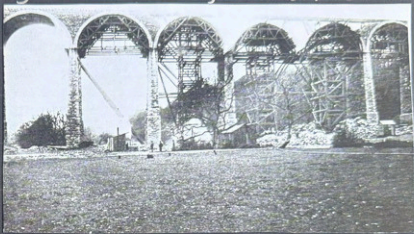
PORTHKERRY



PARK

farming methods for that time. One of the park's most famous features is the large stone railway viaduct.

It was built in the 1890s as part of the railway line linking Barry to the South Wales valleys. The viaduct has



(Old Barry in Pictures, 2017)

16 arches and is still used by trains today.

In 1929, the park was bought by Barry Urban District Council and opened as a public park. During World War II, British and American forces used parts of the park to prepare for the D-Day landings in Normandy. Troops lived in camps here and parked military vehicles all over the grass.

In 1976, it was officially named a country park to protect its wildlife and provide a place for people to enjoy nature.

Porthkerry Park is in a deep valley, so its flat fields flood very easily. In 2019, heavy rain and stones on the beach blocked the water from flowing away.



This caused bad, permanent flooding that forced the park's golf course to close down.

(SWRC, 2024)

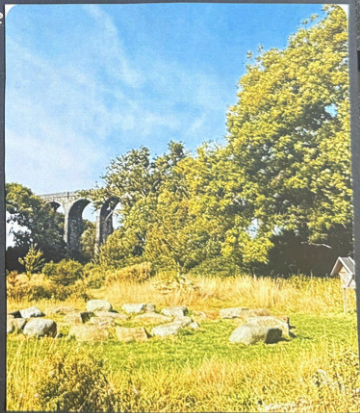
To fix the problem, the land was turned into a natural wetland. New ponds and wider streams were dug to soak up the rainwater like big sponges. Today, heavy storms still flood the paths, showing visitors how nature changes and adapts first-hand.



(SWRC, 2024)



I chose Porthkerry Park because it provides a meaningful setting to explore the principles of the John Muir Award alongside the value of outdoor learning in early years education. I wanted to develop my understanding of how regular experiences in nature can encourage children's curiosity, confidence, wellbeing, and respect for the environment. It also gives me the opportunity to explore how outdoor learning can promote sustainability by helping children develop an appreciation for nature and understand the importance of caring for the environment.





Watch the trails

At Porthkerry Park, I can

find specific interactive boards

and updated signages at key

entry hubs, transition zones, and trail junctions across the

220-acre site.

Within these interactive boards, I can uncover fascinating

facts about the park's wildlife, and match them with real-life

discoveries along the trails.

For example, I gained a wider

understanding of ephemeral ponds,

exploring how temporary pools

support rare amphibians during

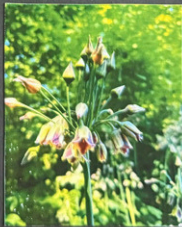




The wild poppy

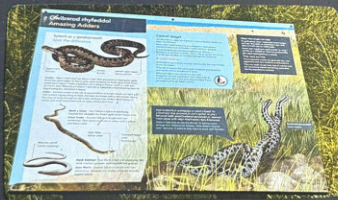


The wild garlic



the breeding season. I am able to observe how these essential ponds change between dry and wet weather conditions, and I even learned how to create my own pond at home.

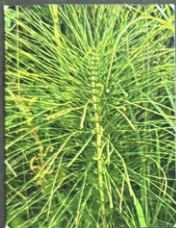
These displays also warn me about venomous snakes in the park. I know that adders are frequently spotted basking in the sun along the shore, across the rocky banks. Reading further,



I discovered that these snakes hibernate during winter, with the males emerging first in the spring.

Signs such as 'stop, look, listen' are frequently displayed within the park, prompting me to slow down. By pausing, I can hear the sounds of the birds chirping in the canopy,





→ Horsetail



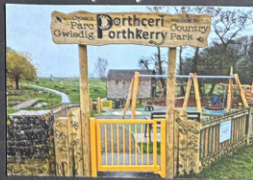
the rustle of leaves in the ancient woodland, and the gentle rush of waves on the nearby shore. Should I have some spare time left, I can play the 'Meadow Magic' matching pairs game

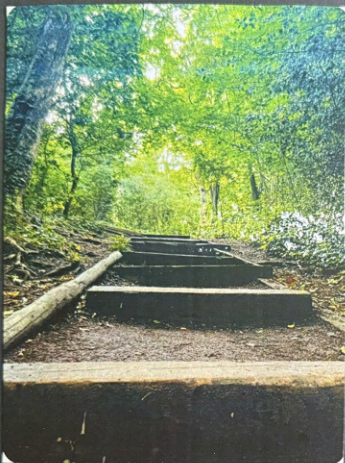


with my children on the boards near the café. This fun activity allows us to match up different native wildflowers, pollinators, and insects that reside within the park's rich, diverse ecosystem.

Play on wooden ship

Just across from this café and the main car park, we can step onto the popular wooden adventure play area. It features a fantastic, custom-built wooden pirate ship equipped







with climbing nets and a slide for children to play up to twelve years old. The inclusive design allows all children to play together, featuring

sensory totems alongside a wheelchair-accessible basket swing.

Feel the nature

Moving past the play area, I can deeply feel nature by exploring the park's peaceful woodland trails. Taking in the dense tree canopy, winding paths, and quiet streams immediately





brings a sense of calm. Walking through the natural tree tunnel and climbing the woodland steps gives me a true sense of escape, while the gently sounds of birds and flowing water highlight the positive effect that spending time in nature has on my wellbeing.

Look for bugs

These quiet woodland trails also offer the perfect opportunity to look for bugs and engage with the environment. By following the interactive story trails posts hidden among the trees, I can search the bark and limestone rocks for mini-beasts.





Bringing along paper and crayons allows me to collect brass rubbings from the plaques, turning a simple walk into an active wildlife treasure hunt.

Watch the waves

Finally, as the trees gives way to the coast, I can step onto the pebble beach to watch the wide waters of the Bristol Channel and feel the refreshing sweep of the sea breeze.

Along the pebble banks and rough grasslands just north





of the beach, I can safely spot native adders basking in the warmth of the sun. When the tide goes out, I can search the exposed rocky areas for small marine creatures like crabs, anemones, and

small fish, or walk straight off the beach to join the cliffside trails of the Wales Coast Path for elevated views of the coastline.





Conserve

Minibeats, Wildlife

- Spiders and grasshoppers: I spotted spiders weaving



webs in the tall grass and grasshoppers leaping through the sunny paths. I was fortunate enough to hold one in my hand



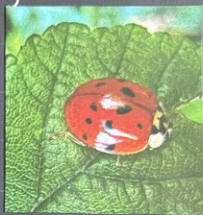
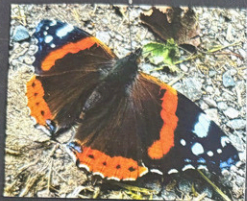
- Slugs and caterpillars: I observed slow-moving



slugs and caterpillars blending into the leaves and feeding along the damp forest floor.



- Butterflies and ladybirds : I watched colorful butterflies fluttering between wildflowers and ladybird crawling over native plants in the open fields.



Ladybirds are natural predators of aphids. They can eat up to 50 aphids a day.

Reptiles

- Frogs : I discovered frogs hiding in the damp mud and vegetation around the park's essential seasonal ponds.

Wood carving!



Crouching near the water's edge, I could see them perfectly camouflaged among the green reeds and thick moss. These ephemeral pools provide a safe, quiet nursery for their tadpoles to grow during the wet spring months before the summer heat arrives.



Peering into the shallow water, I saw tiny tadpoles hiding beneath the floating leaves and thick weeds to stay safe from predators.

Birds

I paused under the canopy to listen to the bright songs of local birds nesting deep in the ancient trees.



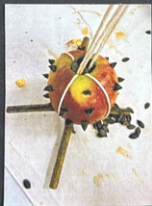
The vibrant melodies echoed through the branches, revealing a lively habitat hidden high above the forest trails.

After visiting Porthkerry Park, I was inspired to help local birds and decided to create a simple homemade



apple bird feeder with my pupils. It was a fun, hand-on activity that encouraged children to care for wildlife. We hung the

feeders



in the nursery garden,

where the children enjoyed watching birds visit for food. This simple project supported local wildlife while helping our young learners connect with

local wildlife





→ Wall barley



← Suncatcher
craft

mature and understand the importance of caring for the environment.

Beehives

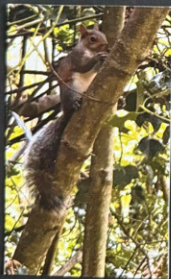
I found managed beehives that help children learn how these vital insects pollinate the park's rich wildflower meadows.



Nearly 90% of wild plants and 75% of major food crops rely on animals like bees to help them grow.



If a bumblebee needs help, place it on a bee-friendly flower. If there are no flowers, offer a drop of 50/50 white sugar and water. Never use honey or brown sugar.



Mammals

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I looked out for busy squirrels climbing up tree trunks.



Here are some interesting facts about squirrels:

- Acrobatic: great climbers and jumpers with excellent balance
- Adaptable: they live in forests, parks and cities.
- Front teeth: their front teeth never stop growing, so they gnaw to keep them short.
- Escape predators: they run in zigzags to avoid predators.
- Food storage: they bury nuts for later, and forgotten nuts can grow into trees.

Blackberries



Blackberry bushes grow in thick, tangled patches that are great homes for wildlife. they give shelter to hedgehogs,

small mammals, reptiles, and nesting birds. They also protect young trees while they grow, stopping animals from eating them.

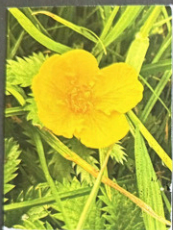


I was lucky enough to see hedgehogs foraging through the fallen leaves in broad daylight.



Hedgehog facts:

- Small legs, but they can travel surprisingly long distances while foraging
- Nocturnal animals - they come out most at night.
- Naturally lactose intolerant (they love dog food)
- Covered in thousands of spines (usually around 5000 - 7000) for protection
- Very smart defence: they roll into a tight spiky ball when threatened.
- Great garden helpers - they eat pests like slugs and insects



→ Buttercups





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I also noticed wild rabbit
feeding peacefully in the sunny
clearings and rough grassy edges
deep within the woodlands.

Share

Gwenfo Cŷw Primary School



I have spoken to children in my class regarding our 'planet home' including places like Porthkerry Park, and what we can do to be its everyday superheroes by sharing its gifts and never letting them go to waste.

Local community Library

I also presented this scrapbook to our library at Gwenfo, and they proposed that once I complete



this module, I should officially donate it to their collection. I believe that it is important for the Gwenfo community to know how our actions have a ripple effect on the wider environment.

Social media

Recording sound clips

Hopefully, I will record sound clips of nature at Porthkerry Park, and upload them to social media to share our local surrounding with others. Through these recordings, I want to emphasise how beautiful this site is and how important it is that we conserve it for our future generations.

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' Please Don't Squish
Me



You may think that I'm scary
Or say I'm only small
Perhaps you think that I'm
no good for anything at all.
But actually it's clever
How I've been put together
And if you get to know me
You'll discover that I'm cool.

So, please don't squish me
please don't squish me
Put me back exactly where
you got me
Please don't poke me, please
don't prod me
let me be a happy minibeast



I taught my Nursery class the song 'Please Don't Squish Me' to promote respect for minibeasts while embedding principles of sustainability. Revisiting the song throughout our minibeast topic provided a sustained context for learning, helping children develop empathy for living things and encouraging respectful interactions with the natural environment.

Taken together, the experiences documented in this scrapbook have reinforced the value of meaningful, play-based learning in supporting children's holistic development. They have strengthened my understanding of the importance of embedding sustainability into everyday practice, fostering children's curiosity, respect for the environment,

and positive attitudes towards caring
for the world around them.

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